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EVANGELICAL AND MYSTICAL PIETY AS REFLECTED
IN THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JOHN WESLEY

MERT MELVIN LAMPSON

A.B., State College of Washington, 1936

M.A., Pacific School of Religion, 1938

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

No writer can escape something of a bias. The frank acknowledgment of this at the outset suggests a respect for a sincere attitude of intellectual humility, and extends to the reader the courtesy of a warning as to where and how to be on his guard. The sophisticated student needs no such warning, though he may appreciate the gesture. I have developed an admiration for the man, who, before presenting his material, admits the possible limitations of his aim and methods, and without pride, invites his audience to be both critical and appreciative.

I began the preparation of this thesis with the strong suspicion that John Wesley could not be classified as a classical or medieval mystic. Just how much of Moravian quietism, or the Quaker's dependence upon the "moving of the Spirit," one could discover in his life and teachings offered inviting fields for investigation. In what manner did he achieve and sustain his sense of God's guidance? Would this reflect mystical or evangelical characteristics? These were intriguing questions. As the study proceeded, unexpected aspects presented themselves. I refer particularly to Wesley's use of the Scriptures, his habit of relating the minute affairs of daily routines to God's will, and his peculiar blending of blindness and sensitivity when dealing with social issues.

In a former thesis, "The Noetic Element in Mysticism," I took a stand with modern interpreters of mysticism, who insisted that when it was stripped of its monistic metaphysics, its abnormal psychological states and its unwholesome asceticism, it became essentially a practice of the presence of God. I was especially interested to determine to what extent Wesley's religion rested upon this kind of foundation.

The knottiest problem of all promised, and turned out to be, one of definitions. It became necessary not only to describe evangelical and mystical piety, but to find out just how they might be related. The term evangelical mysticism suggested itself as the best solution to the problem, from my point of view. Throughout the paper, then, I was motivated by a triple interest, one to learn wherein Wesley's religion departed from, or related itself to, the schools of mysticism, another to trace out the strands of traditional evangelical piety in his life and teachings, and a third to make out as strong a case as possible for the use of the expression evangelical mysticism. My conviction grew that it could be employed not only when speaking of Wesley, but when referring to any within the evangelical tradition who had succeeded in discovering, and having fellowship with, God.

Aside from the values growing out of trying to

answer questions posed by the thesis, there were many others. Chief among them was the erasing of a prejudice I had formerly harbored against a detailed study of the history and characters of one's own religious group. Consciously, I tried to avoid all narrow denominational or sectarian loyalties. Many ministers of my acquaintance had become so enamored of the heroes of their churches, and so proud of past accomplishments, that their perspectives had been warped, their preaching dogmatized, and their ministry a matter of such restricted dimensions that it was no longer worthy of the name.

I reached the very simple conclusion that to be intelligently critical of one's heritage, one must know a great deal about it. Just as important is the complementary fact that appreciation based upon knowledge is the only kind worth having. One who has learned to read at all objectively and to evaluate independently cannot read from and about a great religious leader without growing in many ways. Despite his obvious weaknesses and limitations, John Wesley's ideals for the Christian ministry, and his untiring, unreserved giving of himself, body, mind and spirit to his high calling, shall serve as a goad, as a challenge, and as an inspiration to all who know him well.

EVANGELICAL AND MYSTICAL PIETY AS REFLECTED
IN THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JOHN WESLEY

CHAPTER I

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

A. Introductory Statement

John Wesley denounced the "mystical way" in no uncertain terms. In his own thinking, he belonged wholly to the evangelical tradition as represented by the Church of England. He would have been distressed had he known that nearly two hundred years after his death a Methodist minister would be interested in trying to determine to what extent his life and teachings reflected evangelical and mystical piety.

The first parts of the argument we are going to present would have pleased him, namely, that he had no use for classical and medieval mysticism, that William Law's idea of mystical religion displeased him, that the Moravian quietism aroused his disgust, that Quakerism departed radically from Christianity at important points, that his strenuous personal discipline and sense of divine mission were more evangelical than mystical. When our thesis goes on to claim that the term evangelical mysticism may with appropriateness be applied to Wesley's piety, he would have opposed us. Whether or not he could have been convinced that the real core of evangelical and mystical religion is an ex-

perience of God, and that the most adequate term to describe this communion of the divine with the human spirit is "mysticism," is problematical.

However this may be, we shall be true to the precision with which he thought, and to the clarity with which he both wrote and spoke, if we define as accurately as possible what we mean by evangelical and mystical piety. Only when we have done this can we assign either strain of religious expression to him. Whether our definitions be adequate or not, we shall attempt to represent fairly the important characteristics of Wesley's life and message.

The student soon discovers that there are two ways of interpreting mysticism. One point of view comes through the German school of thought. Friedrich Heiler is a representative of this approach. He derives his definition from the metaphysical beliefs and psychological practices of the classical and medieval mystics. Another view is presented by a group of scholars who feel that mysticism can and should be shorn of its disagreeable associations and be used to designate the riches and best elements in religious experience. Rufus M. Jones is the foremost advocate of this position. In this first chapter, we will present the ideas of both writers. Throughout the thesis there will be occasion to contrast their views.

We shall employ the terms "religion" and "piety" interchangeably. If pressed to make a distinction we would express the relationship between them by saying that one's

piety is a combination of the attitudes and habits through which the quality of his religion becomes manifest.

B. Friedrich Heiler's Concepts of Mystical and Evangelical Religion

In his book, Prayer, Professor Heiler distinguishes between mystical and prophetic prayer. He also uses the term evangelical. As nearly as one can judge, he uses the two latter terms synonymously. Both refer to a Biblical description of communion with God. We are assuming that what he says about prayer, he would be willing to say about piety or religion. Hence, for our purposes, we shall take what he says about mystical and evangelical prayer as equally applicable to mystical and evangelical piety. Piety is a more inclusive term than prayer, but the characteristic emphases of one always carry over into the other. This would be true, no matter what type of religion one chooses to study.

Heiler insists that the two types of prayer differ in motive, form and content. Their ideas of God are unlike, and the relationships to God which they imply are at variance, he says.

The mystic is a devout person, yearning for union with the Infinite. In contrast, the prophetic prayer "arises from a profound need of the heart," the longing for salvation and grace. This much for the motive. Regarding

form, the mystical prayer is "artificially prepared through a refined psychological technique of meditation," whereas the prophetic prayer is a spontaneous breaking forth from the "subconscious depths of the religious soul that has been deeply stirred". In respect to content, the mystic's orison is "silent, contemplative delight". In sharp contrast, prophetic prayer is characterized by a "passionate crying and groaning, vehement complaint and pleading. While mysticism exalts the spirit to the highest good, prophetic prayer is a simple outpouring of the heart. "Mystical prayer is a weary climbing by degrees to the heights of vision and union with God; prophetic prayer a stormy assault upon the Father's heart." Mystical prayer employs the stages of purification, enlightenment, union, making continuous progress toward God; prophetic prayer deals with inner transformation, "radical revolution," "anxious fear and eager longing pass over into serene trust and the joy of calm surrender."

When we turn to the conception of God we find that Heiler makes strong contrasts. The mystic's idea of God is that of an Infinite One, "the summum bonum in whom the worshiper is completely absorbed." The God of prophetic prayer "is the living Lord, to whom the worshiper is bound with every fibre of his being, the kind Father to whom he clings in absolute trust and confidence."¹

1

Friedrich Heiler, Prayer (New York, 1932), p. 284.

The relation to God of the mystic is that of one who has been consumed in the flame of God's love, dissolved into the glow of the Infinite, melted into the stream of the immeasurable. Prophetic prayer brings the worshiper into a relationship symbolized by Jacob's wrestling with the angel.¹ Herein, the one praying struggles with a God who makes imperious demands. Heiler sees mystical prayer as a "passing away in desire for the divine Loved One", followed by a blessed tranquillity and ecstatic delight in the tender embrace of the Heavenly Bridegroom". Prophetic prayer, on the other hand, is an attitude of humble reverence before a Lord enthroned in eternal majesty, "a timorous pleading of the guilt-laden soul before the stern Judge, a heartfelt, trusting approach of the child to the loving Father". Mystical prayer is a departure from that of primitive man. It means the complete detachment from one's ego, absorption in the summum bonum. Contrarily, thinks Heiler, the original "naivete' and dramatic quality of primitive prayer reappear in a much refined form in prophetic prayer. Heiler makes this statement:

Like the primitive prayer, prophetic petition is essentially the expression of need, desire for salvation and blessing; it is belief in a God who will hearken and aid.²

¹

The figure of Jacob's struggle with a Celestial Being appears in early Methodist hymns. Both John and Charles Wesley employed it.

²

Ibid., p. 285.

Hebrews and Christians pray is not the same as the supreme Spiritual Value shining on the mystic's horizon. Heiler argues for a living creative ever-active will to whom men turn for help and considers this different from the God to whom the mystics turn. The latter even if more than an abstract value, is estranged from the world. The "solemn homage of believing people before their God, who is also their King" is quite other than the "tender union of a solitary soul with the heavenly Saviour and Bridegroom."

Perhaps we could summarize Heiler's conception of the two kinds of worship in these statements:

1. Mystical prayer is individualistic approaches God through psychological and moral disciplines, seeks union with a Spiritual Value estranged from the world, results in a feeling of tranquility or blessedness.

2. Prophetic or evangelical prayer has a distinct social connotation, a sense of man's common search for God approaches Him through repentance, yearning, even agony of mind and heart. Asks for forgiveness and seeks to be restored to fellowship with the Father. It results in the bestowing of Divine Grace, a release from sin, and a renewed fellowship between the worshiper and God.

Before attempting to criticize Heiler's point of view, it would be well to review what Rufus Jones has to say on the same subject. We will then have materials before us which will allow an evaluation of both writers.

C. Rufus Jones' Concepts of Mystical
and Evangelical Religion

Throughout all his writing, the viewpoint of Professor Jones remains consistently the same. One gets the impression

Heiler sees an underlying quality in both types, despite their differences. He words the matter like this:

All mystic prayer is a rising to the highest good; all prophetic prayer finds its culmination in the desire for the coming of the Kingdom of God,¹ that is the realization of all spiritual values.¹

Having made this concession, Heiler goes on to say that there exists a final distinction between the two. The end of mystical prayer is a static final good, while that of the prophetic worshiper is a "vital, dynamic magnitude, the Kingdom of God." The good sought by the mystic is beyond all concrete reality, "beyond all manifoldness, the 'One', the 'Only'."² The prophetic reality is a God who permeates and controls the cosmos, manifests himself in multiplicity, "God who is all in all."²

In the common prayer of evangelical worship Heiler sees a mystical and prophetic element going hand in hand. Contemplative praise resembles the mystical manner of approach, but the faith that prayer will be answered arises out of prophetic religion. Our author thinks Miss A. L. Strong, an American psychologist, partially right when she says that common prayer contains a mixture of the "contemplative-aesthetic," by which she means a combination of the mystical and "practico-ethical," or prophetic. Heiler prefers a keener distinction and makes it by saying that the relationship is not an inward one. The God to whom the

¹
Ibid., p. 285.

²
Ibid., p. 285.

that he knows the history and character of mysticism as few men today. He is quite critical of its extreme metaphysical presuppositions, its abnormal psychological states, its tendency, at times, to flee from reality. Nevertheless, he sees in mysticism a value which few are qualified to appreciate. His rich background as a Quaker gives him a knowledge of what years of the deliberate practice of the presence of God can mean for individuals and for groups of earnest worshipers. Jones deliberately shaves away the undesirable features which the mystical tradition has taken unto itself, and insists that at the core is a sound, persistent emphasis upon a life lived with God. To Heiler, this would be called a profound religious attitude, congruent with evangelical Christianity, except that it is not always Bible-centered. A quotation from Dr. Jones' latest book, The Flowering of Mysticism, makes his approach clear:

Mysticism, i. e., the attitude of mind which comes into correspondence with a spiritual world-order that is felt to be as real as the visible one, is not confined to any race or any specific latitudes or longitudes. Its course is not primarily determined by geography or climate or pedigree. The moment the soul of man comes to itself, in any land or in any racial boundaries, centers down into its inward deeps, thins the insulating walls that made it seem to be a sundered self, and sensitively responds to the currents of deeper life that surround it, it finds its true element of being and lives joyously and thrillingly in the Life of God. That is mystical life.¹

¹
Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism, The Macmillan Company, (New York, 1939), p. 210.

Those who have reacted strongly against the erotic language of the older mystics, and who find unpalatable the thought of "union" with God, who dislike the approach of moral and spiritual purification as a preparation for experiencing God (as if one could thereby make himself so pure that God could not help but recognize him), who distrust the freedom upon which the mystic insists; a freedom which is critical alike of traditional and institutional Christianity as well as of particular interpretations or emphases upon Scripture will agree with Heiler. Those who wish to keep the strictly rational element supreme in religious experience, and who distrust the deeper layers of emotional, instinctive surgings of the subconscious, will find the approaches of Rufus Jones, Charles A. Bennett, Hocking, and James Bissett Pratt quite unsatisfactory. The objectors agree that a realistic sense of God is necessary for vital religions, but such a sense is not the central characteristic of mysticism, they insist. They prefer the term religious experience to designate contact with God. They are unwilling to include the practices of the Friends as typical of the tradition of mysticism, and will not tolerate this "milder mystical experience" as a clue to mysticism's worth or as a guide to what should be included in its definition.

It is interesting to note that such a critical scholar of mysticism as James H. Leuba, is satisfied to employ

a definition much like that of Jones. He is not unaware of the twenty-six definitions which William R. Inge published in the appendix to Christian Mysticism. He recognizes that in the German language Mystik connotes the type of definition Dr. Jones employs, but that Mysticismus possesses a wider, vaguer meaning, signifying anything marvelous, weird, beyond human reason. The definition which Leuba chooses to use is this:

It will mean for us any experience taken by the experiencer to be a contact (not through the senses but "immediate", "intuitive") or union of the self with a larger-than self, be it called the World-Spirit, God, the Absolute or otherwise.

Whether or not one agrees with Dr. Jones upon interpretations and definitions of mysticism, the objective clarity with which he criticizes the weaknesses of mysticism deserves favourable comment. The following paragraph is a fair example of his objections.

But I cannot praise the tendency to turn wholly away from the ministry of the concrete to the glorification of the utterly abstract, to the empty, contentless and characterless universal, completely above and beyond the concrete.... But it is a very bad start on the journey to say that we must begin by "forsaking" and "turning away" from everything that has been created, every divine light that glimmers in the world of things, every heavenly word that has been uttered in human love and sacrifice. Instead of seeing the Eternal interfused in the temporal, and the Infinite at least adumbrated

1

James H. Leuba, The Psychology of Religious Mysticism, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc., 1925), p. 1. Leuba agrees with Jones in many respects, but they differ sharply when Leuba tries to prove that mysticism has no objective reference.

in the finite, we are told that the Eternal and Infinite are real only in the utterly Beyond. That assumption empties the now and here of all significance and spiritual worth and lands us in an unabridgeable dualism.¹

Heiler would maintain that the very thing which Jones criticizes is characteristic of the temper and genius of mysticism, which means that we must get away from the term if we would define what is best in religious experience. Hence, he would employ prophetic or evangelical religion or piety as more suitable terms. Rufus Jones makes an important observation when he says that mystics are not quite consistent with the dualism of their own theologies. Their experiences are greater than their attempts to explain them. Though their metaphysical presuppositions often place God and man in realms far apart, yet their living has, at its heart, a note in common with all true, evangelical Christianity. The problem resolves itself into a situation in which the realism in religious experience is recognized and cherished by both Heiler and Jones, but where the language used to describe it is different. Heiler puts the Quaker quietism on the side of evangelical Christianity. Jones does the same, but insists, in addition, that they have kept alive what was greatest and most central in the tradition of mysticism. There is a sense in which Heiler uses an exclusive definition, while Jones uses an inclusive

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Rufus Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, pp. 222 ff.

one.

It is a little difficult when we begin with Jones' inclusive definition, to determine how he would distinguish mysticism from evangelicalism. Perhaps he gives us a clue in the following words. Here he is speaking of certain mystical tracts such as The Cloud and The Cloud of Unknowing, which were circulated throughout England just prior to the Lollard preachers.

It was obviously not a type of piety that fitted the aspirations of the Lollard preachers of this century. They were strongly evangelical and turned to the message of the Gospels rather than to the abstruse and solitary way of contemplation, so that it was not likely to be one of the tracts which they carried in the deep pockets of their russet coats. But I feel sure that the lector in my two beloved abbeys in Yorkshire--Gountains and Rievaux--read this Cloud of Unknowing to the monks in the rectory at evening dinner, and that some of the monks learned from it the difficult art of contemplation after the manner of Denis and his English disciple.¹

It is not inappropriate to point out here that this type of abstraction, by Jones' own admission, was foreign to the temper of English psychology and religion on the whole. This fact will be important when we come to consider more carefully the type of mind and piety to which Wesley was exposed.

From the above quotation, it seems that Jones relates evangelical piety to a type of religion which springs out

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Ibid., p. 219.

of a Bible centered approach. Heiler would doubtless agree with this. Further, Heiler would agree with the distinction which Jones makes between Bible-centered religion and the abstract form of mystical experience. Where they would differ is on the point of whether or not the real essence of mysticism necessarily excludes a Bible-centered approach. They would give opposing answers on this point, simply because they would disagree as to what was central in mysticism.

D. Criticism: The Thesis' Point of View

We have written enough to make clear the confusion which can and does exist when one attempts to decide upon the use of such terms as "mystical" "and evangelical." The contrast between Jones and Heiler will be kept in mind throughout the thesis. Our attempt will be to interpret John Wesley's life and teaching for its comparative mystical and evangelical emphases from both points of view. Before turning to the life of John Wesley, a few general observations regarding the comparative merits of Heiler's and Jones' approach will be offered.

The first point to note is that the history of the use of the word "mysticism" is a varied and diffused one. The word was born in connection with the mystery religions of Greek civilization. Leuba and Jones both make this fact clear. The early Neoplatonists used it. Pseudo-Dionysius developed it into the via negativa, the road of intense

abstraction culminating in ecstasy and the cessation of thought processes. Gnosticism gave it a special taint. Later, it was used to designate psychic phenomena, revelations, possessions, secret knowledge. Scientists, today, are sometimes wont to use the term to designate spurious knowledge and occult phenomena. Quite literally, the word has become debased. It is no wonder, as Jones points out, that one uses it at his own peril "to signify the deepest and richest stages of religious experience--direct correspondence with God". The one who employs it today, though it be only in a thesis, must define his use of the term, and be able to offer a reasonable apologetic.

The revitalization of mysticism which the Quaker influence offers, has saved the term from complete disrepute. Jones agrees with Heiler in finding little use for the extravagant erotic language, the spinning of queer abstractions, the negation of the world, (and yet, at the same time being very much in the world by producing physical sensations which give Ecstatic pleasure to the devotee) which has followed traditional mysticism. With the reinterpretation of mysticism on a more rational, let us say, more evangelical foundation, making central the direct experiencing of the Christian God as revealed in the New Testament, I believe there is much ground for accepting the term. There has always been a need for carefully directed and intelligently cultivated meditation in

Christianity. "Religious experience" is, to me, too general a term to cover that phase of religion in which one becomes aware of God. "Mysticism", or finally, "evangelical mysticism" to be technically correct, is a descriptive term which might very well come into popular usage among Christian groups.

More than this, one can support the thesis that Heiler makes too sharp a distinction between what is mystical and what is prophetic. One example will suffice to make this clear. We have quoted him as saying that one distinction between prophetic and mystical prayer is that only in the former is the worshiper motivated by a desire for salvation. Contrariwise, the supreme motivation of the mystic is for union with God, he maintains. When we take statements like Tauler's, "His spirit is as it were lost in the Abyss of the Deity, and loses the consciousness of all creature-distinctions", or of St. Catherine of Genoa, "I wish not for anything that comes forth from Thee, but only for Thee, oh sweetest Love!" we have much reason for making a statement like Heiler's. Plotinus makes the matter still more apparent:

The Soul, having now arrived at the desired end, and participating of Deity, will know that the Supplier of true life is then present. She will likewise then require nothing farther; for, on the contrary it will be requisite to lay aside other things, to stop in this alone, amputating everything else with which she is surrounded.¹

¹

Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1912, pp. 100, 101.

While this may be admitted as characteristic of many of our greatest mystics, the qualifying fact is just as true that the mystic has a genuine impulse for moral perfection. He may not express this in terms of wanting to be saved, but in a very real sense he does want to be saved, saved from the dark passions of his own life, from degrading entanglements with the world. This impulse for moral perfection would be called a form of self-seeking by some. Evelyn Underhill thinks differently. Those who do have this kind of selfish motivation are called by such an important mystic as St. John of the Cross, "spiritual gluttons".

The true mystic claims no promises and makes no demands. He goes because he must, as Galahad went towards the Grail: knowing that for those who can live it, this alone is life By one of the many paradoxes of the spiritual life, he obtains satisfaction because he does not seek it; completes his personality because he gives it up.¹

It was Dionysius the Areopagite who wrote, "Attainment comes only by means of this sincere, spontaneous, and entire surrender of yourself and all things."² Certainly this is a higher motivation, a better moral attitude toward God, than either the excessively groveling sinner who cries out for salvation, or of the one who having once found God through more technically evangelical processes, and then assumes that he is ever after a creature of special spiritual privilege, removed from the curse of

¹

Ibid., p. 110.

²

Ibid., p. 110.

the "damned". Whether we speak of being "saved", or "healing of that human incompleteness which is the origin of our divine unrest", are we not in a very real sense realizing, from a psychological point of view, the same balance of the inner life? Heiler would insist that the first approach carries with it more definitely ethical suggestions, because of the relationship between the sinner and the God who judges and forgives. Yet, we can say of the true mystic that it is his love for God which spurs him to seek a remedy for his own incompleteness. Further, he tries by rigid discipline of mind and heart and action to eliminate sin and impurity from his nature. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God", has special significance for the mystic. It is possible that one who makes this strenuous preparation for a life with God will do more toward character salvation than the one who remains satisfied with only a sense of forgiveness for the wrongs which he is constantly committing. Be this as it may, we have discovered reason for moving the aim of the mystic and the so-called evangelical Christian closer together. It is possible to go further. Just as we may put into self-fulfillment the connotation of salvation, it is just as true that we can start from the orthodox evangelical point of view and read into it mystical meanings and accomplishments. Take the story of the prodigal son, for example. The Father forgives, restores the son to fellowship. One of the hopes

of the son was that his father would find it in his heart to receive him again under the parental roof, making it a spiritual reunion. Repentance, forgiveness, then restoration of companionship. This is not different, basically, from the hope which the mystic has when he seeks for a life with God. To say that the great mystics thought themselves above repentance is nonsense. Heiler avoids making this assertion. They have gone through great agony of soul, in their realization of their unworthiness to be friends and workers with God. They may not have used the evangelical term "repentance," but in the best sense of that word, which means a turning away from, or turning one's back upon, the old, they certainly accomplished the same inner purification, and maintained the same sense of humility as the greatest of those following the more strictly evangelical tradition. Those who set out to discipline themselves rigidly and unceasingly come much closer to the strictly mystical than to the evangelical tradition. This is an important point to remember when we turn to a consideration of John Wesley's private life. To those who would minimize the value of mystical disciplines, we would quote a sentence of Evelyn Underhill's: "So strange and exalted is this life that it never fails to provoke either the anger or the admiration of other men." It is Leuba who writes:

If the great Christian mystics could be brought together in the same place, each in his habitual environment, there to live according to his manner, the

world would soon perceive that they constitute one of the most amazing and profound variations of which the human race has yet been witness.¹

Even more to the point is this statement by the same author:

The best among the prominent mystics are persons of pure heart and stout will from whom it is not possible to withhold admiration. Their beliefs and practices--whatever we may have to say in condemnation of them--have been to these mystics a refuge against the conflicts and the loneliness of life, and a source of strength and courage in the pursuit of worthy purposes.²

Before leaving this matter of salvation, one of the best replies to Heiler is the second chapter of Rudolf Otto's book, Mysticism East and West. The title is "Not Metaphysics but a Doctrine of Salvation." What he says shows that salvation is not a doctrine confined only to what Heiler calls prophetic or evangelical Christianity. A few sentences from this chapter will present the main contention for which Otto argues.

In comparing Sankara and Meister Eckhart, he writes,

Neither of them is concerned for "knowledge" out of curiosity to explain the world, but each is impelled by a longing for "salvation".¹

Speaking of their compelling interest:

This means that their compelling interest is not a scientific interest in the ultimate--in the

¹

Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, p. 112.

²

James H. Leuba, The Psychology of Religious Mysticism, Preface, p. ix.

³

Rudolf Otto, Mysticism East and West, p. 16.

ultimate--in the Absolute and its relation to the world, resulting in some extraordinary statements about the "soul" and its metaphysical relationships--but that....it is the idea of "salus" of salvation, of srexa of Heil, and of how this is to be won.¹

Here Otto sees validity for reading into "salvation" the metaphysical concepts of mysticism:

That the soul is eternally one the Eternal is not a scientifically interesting statement, but is that fact upon which the salvation of the soul depends. All affirmations and arguments in proof of the absolute unity, the complete simplicity, and the perfect identity of the soul with God, all the evidence and declamation against multiplicity, separateness, division and manifoldness--however much they may sound like rational ontology--are for both of them only ultimately significant because they are "saving".²

He concludes his chapter with this emphasis:

Brahman for Sankara and God and Godhead for Eckhart...is the One who saves, and is the super-abounding value and salvation itself. It is for this reason alone that Sankara proclaims his Brahmajijnasa and Eckhart his metaphysic of Being and supra-Being. For this alone they spend themselves in thought and create their doctrine and attempt to destroy opposing doctrines.³

Thus Otto sees in Christian mysticism, as represented at least in Eckhart, the science or metaphysic of Being resolve itself in its real essence into a desire for salvation. Leuba stresses salvation in Christian mysticism from a

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Ibid., pp. 16, 17.

²

Ibid.

³

Ibid., p. 28.

slightly different point of view. He approaches the matter from a consideration of the elements which went into the education of typical mystics. Self-surrender to God's Will and chastity are two important ideals of monastic Christianity. These ideals were represented by the church as condition for securing the Divine love. He writes:

One of the effects of that belief is that chastity does not appear merely as an abstention, a negative virtue; it leads up to a most intense love. Our mystics were taught furthermore that the only means of adequately realizing these two ideals are to be found in the Christian scheme of salvation.¹

If we read this motivation into the lives of such mystics as Santa Theresa, St. Marguerite Marie, Mme Guyon, St. Catherine of Genoa, Heinrich Suzo, we appear to be doing them no violence. While they may not have stressed salvation as a word, the reality of the soul's condition for which it stood was sought by them all. In A Philosophical Study of Mysticism, Charles A. Bennett lists the desire for salvation as one of the chief motivations behind the mystic's search for God.

On the matter of salvation we can say, finally, that Heiler draws too sharp a distinction between mystical and evangelical or prophetic worship. No one could support the claim, however, that the two emphases are identical. The evangelical approach stresses repentance, forgiveness, good works, and the Bible as mediator of revelation; espec-

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Ibid.

ially is this true of the Methodists. The mystics, on the other hand, make a unique effort to develop a continuing sense of God's presence. Evangelicals do not always make this attempt. The mystic always has the deeper sense of an Over-Soul. By temperament, he is more open to the influx of the Spirit from without. On the whole, mystics are impatient of the notion that their revelations must be tested by the Scriptures. Mediation is not necessary. The evangelical group have a much larger portion of matter-of-fact persons, who, in the words of Coleridge, as called to our attention by Rufus Jones, may maintain when they choose "a willing suspension of disbelief." As over against this, the mystics belong to the order of poets and artistic geniuses. They have periods of "dryness", but belief in the Spiritual world literally overwhelms many of them. When we look at the life of John Wesley, we find a peculiar blending of practicality and the sense of God's presence. We shall have occasion to consider this in some detail later.

There is at least one other cleavage too sharply made by Heiler between mystical and evangelical religion. It is in the use of the word "prophetic." He does not use the term in connection with mysticism. From the point of view of this thesis, this is one of the chief limitations of his treatment. Jones uses the term often in his description of the mystic's religion. What are we to say on this point?

It is true that the mystics probably did not consider

themselves to be among the great prophetic voices in the Hebrew-Christian tradition. Their messages could not be classified, for the most part, with the ethical and moral denunciations of Amos or Hosea or Jeremiah, even though much of their writing is invaluable for its insights into the spiritual life. Their works deal most specifically though not exclusively, with the inner dimensions of the soul, and with a life dedicated wholly to a God of Love.

There are respects, however, in which one might very well relate the mystics to the Canonical prophets. In the first place, their experience of God was immediate, real beyond all doubt, compelling in the sense that it not only changed the inner life, but resulted in a conviction that a message of Divine importance should be proclaimed. Again, like their predecessors, the mystics went their own way, feeling no compunctions when criticizing the established conventions in religion. They proclaimed the freedom of the spirit to find God and to find God and to proclaim His will. Traditionally described patterns of religious experience meant little to either prophet or mystic. Isaiah loved his Temple, and Saint Francis of Assissi loved the Church, but neither felt himself bound by the authority of these institutions. Just as Elijah was a troubler of Israel, and Jeremiah was denounced by Hilkiah of the Temple, in a similar manner, the mystics have been the rebels within their church groups. This is especially true within the

Catholic domain, to which, as a matter of historical record, most of the great mystics belong.

Some scholars maintain that the ecstatic states of the Hebrew prophets can be likened, psychologically, to the ecstatic experiences of mystics such as Santa Theresa and Mme. Guyon, even though the metaphysical presuppositions of each group were quite unlike each other. Jones has referred to mystics as "hundred horse-power men", a phrase which is descriptive alike of the prophets who feared neither church nor government, and of the mystics who willingly defied church tradition and evil in their time. Both are powerful in the sense, too, that they were certain of God's abiding reality within and above themselves. Here we have to tread with care, for the mystical interpretation often lended itself to an idealistic philosophy, or an absolute monism. There is, nevertheless, a strong emphasis in many mystics, as Evelyn Underhill reminds us, that speaks of the God within, reaching out to the God without. This is often coupled with a vigorous vitalism. We can say, with caution, that the God of the Hebrews who was closer than hands and feet, yet abiding in the heavens from whence he declared His glory, is not unrelated to the Being in the mystics' vitalism, balanced over against a God who is quite Beyond. The main difference at this point would be, not in the engendered sense of awe, not in the conviction of the proximity of God and man, but in the realistic, anthromorphic language of the Hebrews as it

contrasts with the metaphysical abstractions of the mystics. Prophets and mystics do not differ in the richness of their experience, but in the explanation of it.

More could be said to refute Heiler's description of mystical and prophetic worship, but we have covered enough ground to indicate that there is justification for a more inclusive view of which Rufus Jones is an able representative. We will summarize the points for which this paper contends below.

1. Evangelical piety stems from the Bible as mediator of God's revelation, and is especially concerned with the New Testament emphasis of repentance, forgiveness, salvation through grace, restoration to fellowship with God, the Father, and proof of salvation through good works.

2. Mystical piety, within the Christian religion, is interested in salvation, achieved through a process of purification and discipline, followed by, and coupled with, directed meditation and contemplation. The Bible is important, but is not considered the final revelation of God's Will. Through this process the soul is finally blessed as it directly experiences the God of love. A point not before mentioned is that mystics are famous for their great efforts on behalf of their fellow men. This has not always been true in the earlier portion of their lives when their religion was in its most subjective stage. Spiritual maturity and inner poise of a sort having been gained, they plunged whole-heartedly into the life of the world in a most effective manner.¹

3. The mystic is not entirely outside the evangelical tradition. In his interest in salvation, and in his convincingly real experience of God he falls well within it. There is good reason, therefore for the use of such a term as "evangelical mysticism".

1

Our last chapter will deal with this matter again. See page 109.

It would be a practice of the presence of God, patterned after the Quaker approach, and shorn of the abstractions of metaphysical explanations and relieved from the emotional excesses of the older school of mysticism.

In the chapters which follow we will attempt to contrast the varying interpretations which according to Heiler's and Jones' definitions may be given to Heiler of Wesley's life and teachings. The underlying motive will be to experiment with the term evangelical mysticism, as the one best descriptive of Methodism's first, and perhaps greatest, saint.

CHAPTER II

MYSTICAL WRITERS WHO INFLUENCED WESLEY-- AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

A. Mystical Writers Read at Oxford

Despite the fact that John Wesley was quite critical of certain mystical writers which he read, their preachments made a lasting impression upon him. This chapter will concern itself with those preachments and the extent to which they had a part in the development of his religion.

Fourteen years before his death, Wesley wrote A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. The opening paragraphs deal with the mystical literature which he read in his first years at Oxford. Bishop Jeremy Taylor's Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying moved Wesley's will strongly. As a result he resolved "instantly" to dedicate all his life to God. There was no middle path between serving God and the devil. This was in 1725. The following year he became acquainted with Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ.¹ Its exposition of "the religion of the heart," convinced Wesley that he must give God all his heart as well as "all his life." The distinction which we are led to make between "all

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Here and elsewhere Wesley refers to Kempis' book as Christian Patterns, although the title Imitation of Christ is employed in letters to his mother. See John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (New York; undated), p. 4.

his life" and "all his heart," is a simple matter of degree of feeling and commitment. "Simplicity of intention and purity of affection," were phrases which appealed directly to his religious sensibilities. It was Wesley's purpose henceforth to have "one design" in all he spoke and did, and "to be subject to one desire" which would "rule" all his "tempers."

Within two years, Mr. Law's two earlier books, Christian Perfection and Serious Call were put into Wesley's hands. These ripened his conviction that "being half a Christian" was a spiritual anachronism. He was now convinced of the "absolute necessity" of God's grace. He must yield body, soul, and substance to the divine command.

At about this same time, Wesley linked with this interest in inner holiness, which had been aroused by Taylor, Kempis and Law, a passion to study the Bible "as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion." Henceforth he often referred to himself as "a man of one book." From the Scriptures he took such terms as "the mind which was in Christ," and "walking as Christ also walked," and equated them with the mystical terms "purity of intention," and "the religion of the heart."

There was no sense in which he ever departed from these first premises. His interest began with the inner remaking of individuals, though it did not end until men were Christian in all their relationships. How this branched out into

social issues shall concern us in the concluding chapter.

Though Wesley speaks only briefly, and appreciatively, of these mystical writers in Christian Perfection, his Journal presents a fuller picture of his opinion of them. In May 1783 he gives us a brief resume of his religious development and makes clear the important contributions of the mystical writers.

The "Washing of the Holy Ghost" which he had received in early baptism, maintained its efficiency until he was ten years old, at which time he went to the Charterhouse School in London. Of these ten years he makes the comment:

But all that was said to me of inward obedience or holiness I neither understood nor remembered. So that I was indeed as ignorant of the true meaning of the law as I was of the gospel of Christ.¹

His next six or seven years were spent in an environment from which "outward restraints being removed" he was more "negligent" than before and was continually "guilty of outward sins." These were not "scandalous" in the eyes of the world, but were considered sins by him. He admits that he still said his prayers morning and evening and read the Scriptures. His notion of his own salvation at that period had three points of reference: "(1) not being so bad as other people; (2) having still a kindness for

¹

John Wesley, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley (Standard edition, edited by Nehemiah Curnock.) Vol. I of eight volumes. (New York, 1909), p. 465.

religion; and (3) reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers."¹

A week after his seventeenth birthday, he went to Christ Church College, Oxford. Here he still said his prayers "both in public and in private," reading the Scriptures and other books of religion. Still he maintains:

I had not all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness; nay went on habitually, and for the most part very contentedly, in some or other known sin: indeed with some intermission and short struggles, especially before and after the Holy Communion, which I was obliged to receive thrice a year.²

¹

Ibid., p. 466. Much has been written to show the depth of degradation into which Wesley fell. Tyerman, for instance, tells us that even as a boy at home he felt himself "answerable to his reason and conscience for everything he did." His father considered him pious enough to be admitted to communion at eight years of age. Yet, Tyerman makes the flat assertion that "young John" lost his religion at Charterhouse, entering it as a "saint" and leaving it as a "sinner." See L. Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley (New York, 1872), Vol. I, pp. 19-22.

Bishop McConnell in John Wesley, pp. 57 ff., and Eltzholz in John Wesley's Conversion and Sanctification, pp. 8, 9, give us a more plausible interpretation in suggesting that as Wesley looked back upon his boyhood, he exaggerated his early backslidings, in order to heighten the marvelous experience at Aldersgate. His special effort was to increase the contrast between an earlier lack of earnestness and a later strenuous search for holiness. Wesley developed the term "Christian Perfection" to designate this search, the limitations of which became apparent in the long series of misunderstandings, confusion, and even calumny to which it led, not alone among the laity, but within the ranks of early Methodist preachers.

²

Ibid., p. 466.

He wonders, in looking back, how he could have hoped to be saved through such a procedure, unless perchance through "transient fits" of "repentance."

Nowhere does he see anything strange that despite his lack of spiritual attainment he entered holy orders at the age of twenty-two. It was at this time that "the providence of God" directed him to read Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ. The additional comment which his Journal gives, here, not contained in his account of Christian Perfection, is this: "I was, however, very angry at Kempis for being too strict; though I read him only in Dean Stanhope's translation."¹

Despite this element of criticism, the book was instrumental in causing him to regard the author as his "religious friend." The influence was marked:

I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new life. I set aside an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at, and pray for inward holiness.²

He regarded himself, because of these observations, "a good Christian."

Soon he was elected a fellow in Lincoln College, where he began a practice which became a permanent habit, the "shaking off" all "trifling" acquaintances. Time became quite valuable in his sight, and he watched more and more

¹ Ibid., p. 466 f.

² Ibid., p. 467.

against "actual sins." No one can say just how much Kempis was responsible for this new zeal for discipline and righteousness, but it remains true that his work was the immediate spur which moved John Wesley to engage upon a life of strenuous spiritual discipline. Again we should note that according to the Journal, John Wesley was "much offended at many parts" of William Law's books. Yet he was inspired to keep God's "whole law, inward and outward," to the "utmost" of his power. By so doing he was persuaded that God would accept him, and that he was "even then in a state of salvation."

There followed the well-known period of visiting prisons, helping the poor, and further practice of strenuous austerities. Wesley writes that he "abridged" himself of "all superfluities, and many that" were called "necessities of life". That he became a "by-word" for such abstemiousness caused him to rejoice.

The net result of several years of "diligently striving against all sin," and attending upon regular means of grace, and omitting "no occasion for doing good," left Wesley dissatisfied. He apprehended himself to be "near death," and he found no comfort or "assurance of acceptance with God." His conclusions on this point were definite:

At this I was then not a little surprised; not imagining I had been all this time building on the sand, nor considering that 'other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid' by God 'even Christ Jesus.' " 1

The next item of interest along this line mentioned in his Journal is the account of a "contemplative man,"¹ who convinced him still more that "outward works" were "nothing, being alone." This person instructed Wesley in matters of holiness, advocating the "union of the soul with God." Wesley offered the following objections:

(1) It included an "incautious" speaking against trust in outward works, so much so that one was discouraged from "doing them at all."

(2) "Mental prayer" was the most effectual means of purifying the soul, and was to be considered as a "good work". "Now these were, in truth," writes Wesley, "as much my own works as visiting the sick or clothing the naked; and the union with God thus pursued was as really my own righteousness as any I had before pursued under another name."²

Wesley concludes that all these are refined ways of trusting to his own works and his own righteousness. He maintains that they are characteristic of those doctrines "zealously inculcated by the Mystic writers." In a word, he finds them both a hindrance and a help in the formulation of his own piety. The combined influences of Kempis and Law could not keep him from dragging on "heavily, finding no comfort or help therein."

B. Moravian Influence: Peter Bohler

On board the ship bound for America, Wesley met the Moravian brethren who endeavored to show him "a more ex-

¹ ¹All we know for certain about this man was that his teachings were of a mystical nature. William Law, Gambold, Clayton, Hervey and the Rev. Mr. Hoole, rector of Haxey, Samuel Wesley's friend and nearest neighbor, are all possibilities.

²Wesley, Journal, Standard edition, Vol. I, p. 469.

¹ cellent way." At first, he says that he was "too learned and too wise" to understand. All the time at Savannah, Georgia, he "was thus beating the air." He was ignorant "of the righteousness of Christ," was unaware of the "living faith" by which salvation came to believers. He felt that he had been "carnal, sold under sin." The cry of Paul expressed his inner state, "What I do, I allow not: for what I would, I do not; but what I hate that I do." He considered himself under "captivity to the law of sin," a state wherein he was "fighting continually, but not conquering." He sums up his spiritual predicament, at the eve of his return to England as follows:

During this whole struggle between nature and grace, which had now continued above ten years, I had many remarkable returns to prayer, especially when I was in trouble; I had many sensible comforts, which are indeed no other than short anticipations of the life of faith. But I was still 'under the law' not 'under grace' (the state most who are called Christians are content to live and die in); for I was only striving with, not freed from, sin. Neither had I the witness of the Spirit with my spirit, and indeed could not; for I 'sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.'²

¹

In this thesis we are including Moravian Quietists under the classification of "mystics." They are like the mystics in striving for an inner feeling of union, in minimizing outward works, and making a more personal than social emphasis in piety. As noted in Chapter I, however, it is only the exaggerated strain of medieval mysticism which can thus be clearly characterized. Evangelical mysticism includes a strong imperative and compulsion toward active service, and places obedience on a par with the practice of God's presence.

²Wesley, Journal, Standard edition, Vol. I, pp. 470 ff.

The mystics, including the Moravians, had not shown him the way out of his difficulty. At this point he met Peter Bohler, "whom God prepared for me as soon as I came to London." Bohler introduced him to the concept of faith through Christ, which he claimed resulted in dominion over sin and a knowledge of forgiveness. Wesley's difficulty was that he could not "feel" the forgiveness. He took this as a sad proof that he had not found the real faith. After some disputation, Wesley was convinced that Bohler's claims were Scriptural. The net effect upon Wesley was important. He writes of seeking through definite means to attain the desired faith:

(1) By absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not from my youth up;

(2) By adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him, as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.¹

A new world opened for Wesley at the Aldersgate experience. The warming of heart and the sense of forgiveness which pervaded his inner consciousness, set him forth from the Moravian meeting on May 24, 1738 with a new lease on life. He found himself earnestly praying for all who had despitefully used him; he could not refrain from testifying openly to all present what he had felt. However, he was not

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Ibid., p. 472.

free from moments of depression. The tempter did not leave him in peace, but he had found the light by which he could wend his groping way through the labyrinth of darkness. Regarding the two states, he wrote:

He 'sent me help from His holy place,' and herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror.¹

The Moravians had not been able to make a quietist out of John Wesley, but they had been one of the chief instruments through which he was led to experience for himself the meaning of forgiveness and grace. Going back to the first mystical writer, Bishop Taylor, who moved Wesley to dedicate all his life to God, and following Wesley's fortunes through his combination of distrust and enthusiasm for Kempis and Law, his "beating of the air" in Savannah, his insight into faith through Peter Bohler, and the Moravian meeting, we find a steady chain of influence from mystical sources. We know that at least two of the authors mentioned had been read critically as well as appreciatively. He had gone a long way on the road toward quietism, far enough to find the place and the time that God could touch his life in a moving way. We may say that it was a mystical kind of piety which brought Wesley to experiential religion.

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Ibid., pp. 476 f.

When Wesley visited the Moravians at Herrnhutt he discovered that his expectations were far beyond any possible fulfillment. His active, strongly extraverted nature could not long abide their retiring, introvert type of religion. Their Lutheran emphasis upon the uselessness of good works turned Wesley's practical mind against them. He could follow their teachings no further. Their contribution to his life had been made.

C. Later References to Mystical Writers

Here and there throughout his writings, we find John Wesley making allusions to mystical religion, and mystical literature. Their extravagant language, their peculiar psychological states, their exaggerated asceticism revolted him. By looking at a few of these we can the better round out what we wish to say about the possible extent of mystical piety in Wesley's life and teachings.

He wrote a strong letter of protest to Mr. Law, probably on May 30, seven days after his Aldersgate experience. The reason for the protest was Law's lack of emphasis upon the saving power of faith. Dr. Flew assures us that, from the standpoint of argument alone, Law was more than a match for Wesley. He emphasizes the real weakness of Law's position as being one retired from contact with the real stuff of life. The Nonjuror lacked the evangelist's ability

to make the final, effective appeal to the human will. He was unable to implement his message into men's experiences. Nevertheless, in later life Wesley referred to Law as one of his most valued friends. He was forever appreciative of what the Serious Call and Christian Perfection had meant to him during his period of awakening.

The language and theories of Jacob Boehme, the sixteenth-century mystic, greatly influenced the work of Law. No doubt aware of this connection, Wesley himself tried to read Boehme. The result is best told in his own words:

Here I met once more with the works of a celebrated author, of whom many great men cannot speak without rapture and the strongest expressions of admiration. I mean Jacob Boehme. The book I now opened was his Mysterium Magnum, or Exposition of Genesis. Being conscious of my ignorance, I earnestly considered what I read, and endeavoured to weigh it in the balance of the sanctuary. And what can I say concerning the part I read? I can and must say thus much (and that with as full evidence as I can say that two and two make four), it is sublime nonsense; inimitable bombast; fustian not to be paralleled! All of a piece with his inspired interpretation of the word tetragrammaton, on which (mistaking it for the unutterable Name itself, whereas it means only a word consisting of four letters) he comments with such exquisite gravity and solemnity, telling you the meaning of every syllable of it!¹

We said earlier that the practicality of the English mind in the eighteenth century was not congenial to the spreading of mysticism. Certainly, Wesley, in this sense,

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Quoted by D. Baines-Griffiths in Wesley the Anglican (London, 1919), pp. 30 f.

was a man of his day, a religious leader whose views were tempered by the common sense outlook of his countrymen.

Our chief concern is not with our own evaluations of Boehme, but with Wesley's response to him. Keeping this in mind, it will be interesting to note that Rufus Jones quotes from Boehme, in The Flowering of Mysticism, as follows:

While I was in affliction and trouble, I elevated my spirit, and earnestly raised it up unto God, as with a great stress and onset, lifting up my whole heart and mind and will and resolution to wrestle with the love and mercy of God and not to give over unless He blessed me--then the Spirit did break through. When in my resolved zeal I made such an assault, storm and onset upon God, as if I had more reserves of virtue and power ready, with a resolution to hazard my life upon it, suddenly my spirit did break through the Gate, not without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and I reached the innermost Birth of the Deity and there I was embraced with love as a bridegroom embraces his bride. My triumphing can be compared to nothing but the experience in which life is generated in the midst of death or like the resurrection from the dead. In this Light my spirit suddenly saw through all, and in all created things, even in herbs and grass, I knew God--who He is, how He is, and what His will is--and suddenly in that Light my will was set upon by a mighty impulse to describe the being of God.¹

While this is not a paragraph from the specific work criticized by Wesley, it shows the kind of imagery and vocabulary which were obnoxious to him. Wesley's own language was plain, unadorned with metaphor, and almost devoid of illustrative materials. Jones thinks the above citation is

1

Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism, pp. 256 f.

"one of the most remarkable experiences of all Protestant mystics." We may agree with Jones, but cannot bring ourselves to an acceptance of such terminology. Wesley may have sensed the genuine spiritual fervor behind the words of Boehme, but its figures of speech and mental images were altogether distasteful. This is made clear by a passage in his Journal in which he deals with this specific item. It is reproduced below. When he applies his usual test of "reason and scripture" to the mystical writers this is how he feels:

These considerations insensibly stole upon me as I grew acquainted with the Mystic writers, whose noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid. But in truth they made good works appear so too; yea, and faith itself, and what not? These gave me an entire new view of religion--nothing like any I had before. But, alas! it was nothing like that religion which Christ and His apostles lived and taught. I had a plenary dispensation from all the commands of God: the form ran thus, 'Love is all; all the commands beside are only means of love: you must choose those which you feel are means to you, and use them as long as they are so.' Thus were all the bands burst at once. And though I could never fully come into this, nor contentedly omit what God had enjoined; yet, I know not how, I fluctuated between obedience and disobedience. I had no heart, no vigour, no zeal in obeying; continually doubting whether I was right or wrong, and never out of perplexities and entanglements. Nor can I at this hour give a distinct account how or when I came a little back toward the right way: only my present sense is this--all the other enemies of Christianity are triflers; the Muggins are the most dangerous of its enemies. They stab it in the vitals; and its most serious professors are likely to fall by them. May I praise Him who hath snatched me out of this fire likewise, by warning all others that it is set on fire of hell.¹

¹

Wesley, Journal, Standard edition, Vol. I, p. 420.
The italics are mine.

If it is true--a possibility suggested by Flew--that the mystics read by Wesley overemphasized the feminine motif in Christianity, Wesley himself made a strong emphasis on the masculine side. I think one can see in Wesley's attitude something akin to the Ritschlian position which argues that mysticism is not Christian, but pantheistic. The church's dogma, they say, must exalt the historical Christ. The human Jesus presents to us a certain content which is "comparably richer than that of any feelings which arise within ourselves, a fact, moreover, which makes us so certain of God, that, our reason and conscience being judges, our conviction is only confirmed that we are in communion with Him."¹

These and other remarks of Wesley were in the background of our thinking when we earlier made the remark that Wesley would have been greatly perturbed had he known that anyone should look into his life and teachings to discover signs of mystical piety. Reason, conscience, reading the Scriptures, and prayer were the guides used by him. While it is true that he sanctioned the sporadic outcropping of convulsions and trance--like mental states which seized early Methodist converts, he nevertheless did not associate such phenomena with mystical religion, even though he felt that they were evi-

¹Wilhelm Herrmann, Communion with God (London, 1895), p. 31. The italics are mine.

dences of the Spirit's work. Wesley went no further, apparently, in his own emotional expression than to be guilty of more zeal than wisdom, more determination than tact, during the first months of preaching.

The following excerpt from a letter describing the Wesleys, shows something of their early, perhaps illy expressed, enthusiasm. The scene took place in Mr. Hutton's home on College Street. The writer is Mrs. Hutton, and the one addressed is Samuel Wesley, Junior.

But your brother John seems to be turned a wild enthusiast, or fanatic, and, to our very great affliction, is drawing our two children into these wild notions by their great opinion of Mr. John's sanctity and judgment.

She implores Samuel to

confine or convert Mr. John when he is with you. For after his behaviour on Sunday, May 28, when you hear it, you will think him not quite a right man....Mr. John got up and told the people that five days before he was not a Christian, and this he was as well assured of as that five days before he was not in that room, and the way for them all to be Christians was to believe, and own that they were not now Christians.

Mrs. Hutton warned him to have a care how he despised the sacraments as a means of grace. The letter continues:

At supper in the parlour he made the same wild speech again, to which I made answer, 'If you was not a Christian ever since I knew you, you was a great hypocrite, for you made us all believe you was one...' If there cannot be some stop put to this, and he can be taught true humility, the mischief he will do wherever he goes among the ignorant but well-meaning Christians will be very great. ¹

¹ Wesley, Journal, Standard edition, Vol. I, pp. 480 f.
(note).

The editor of the Journal makes this summary of the situation:

If at this distance of time we read through the letters passing from one to another, not among godless enemies, but in the inner circle of kinsfolk and friends, and compare them with the Journals, we shall find abundant proof that the Wesleys were being driven hither and thither on waves of intense spiritual excitement....No wonder that godly and sober-minded people like Mrs. Wesley, and Martha Hall, and the Huttons, and Samuel Wesley, and Hervey and Broughton were perplexed and distressed.¹

The social element in this zeal marks, at once, its distinction from the individualistic trend in the mysticism of the middle ages. Strangely enough, we have mystical writers, and a quietistic sect, leading John Wesley to a new relationship with God, a relationship which in the terms adopted by this paper can be called evangelical mysticism. All who are willing to concede that the real heart of a mystical experience is the touch of the Divine upon the human soul, will find no particular difficulty with the terminology for which we are arguing.

Wesley is even more specific in his objections to mystical religion of the older type than any of the quotations so far cited have indicated. In his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, he lists a number of mistakes which are aberrations of true piety. He does not call these specifically "mystical mistakes," but one cannot read far into medieval mysticism without finding them all. We will

¹

Ibid., p. 480 (note).

quote the fourteen evils against which Wesley wished to warn Methodist converts. Folks often fancied, he said, that they received these things as gifts, when they were reall the victims of "enthusiasm." We must remind ourselves that Wesley when warning against enthusiasm, used it as a synonym for fanaticism. These are the fourteen "evils".

.....(1)The loving of God with all our mind; (2) with all our soul; (3) with all our strength; (4) oneness with God; (5) oneness with Christ; (6) having our life hid with Christ in God; (7) being dead with Christ; (8) rising with him; (9) the sitting with him in heavenly places; (10) the being taken up into his throne; (11) the being in the New Jerusalem; (12) the seeing the tabernacle of God come down among men; (13) the being dead to all works; (14) the not being liable to death, pain, or grief, or temptation.

It is not clear just why Wesley should object to the first three. Nothing which precedes or which follows this list makes the matter clear. One reason for "these and a thousand mistakes" is "the not considering deeply

that love is the highest gift of God, humble, gentle, patient love; that all visions, revelations, manifestations whatever, are little things compared to love, and that all the gifts above mentioned are either the same with, or infinitely inferior to, it... the moment God has saved you from all sin you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this till you are carried into Abraham's bosom.¹

Despite his emphasis upon love as central, Wesley is keen enough to recognize its possible misuses, if not its actual limitations, in the human sphere. Love does not make one infallible, he insists; therefore, he will be open to many mistakes. Improper tempers, words and actions will

¹Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, pp. 140 ff.

result. We may love a person less than he deserves, thereby being led to speak or act with regard to that person "in such a manner as in contrary to this law" of love.¹

Mortification of the flesh was displeasing to Wesley. He writes of a Mr. De Renty, that in wearing an iron girdle as a means of subjecting himself to God, was a matter of mistaken judgment. He admits that folks "in the highest state of grace" may perform such extravagances.² This is all of a piece with his opinion of Catherine of Genoa when he called her "a fool of a saint." Wesley was keen enough to recognize, however, the possibility that considerable legend had grown up around Catherine, a fact which historians have since uncovered.

In his book, The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century, Overton presents a piece of advice which Primate Potter gave Wesley early in the latter's ministry:

If you desire to be extensively useful, do not spend your time and strength in contending for or against things of a disputable nature, but in promoting real, essential holiness.³

What Overton says of the relationship between this advice (which represented Wesley's practical aim through-

¹ Ibid., p. 112.

² Ibid., p. 63.

³ J. H. Overton, The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1900), p. 23.

out his ministry) and Wesley's opinion of Calvinists, quietists and mystics, is sound:

It was the same practical end in view that he set so firm a face against Calvinism--again to the deep offence of many of his co-religionists; for he felt that there was a practical danger of Calvinism leading to Antinomianism, as in some instances it undoubtedly did. The same cause led him to oppose the mystic 'stillness' of the Moravians, for he felt that the Christian's duty was to work and not to wait, or rather to wait in working. The same cause brought him into antagonism with the far more refined and intellectual mysticism which fascinated his quondam friend and oracle, William Law. The same desire of doing good led him to waive clerical etiquette, and intrude even into the parishes of Evangelical clergymen.¹

D. Summary

We have seen that Wesley owed a great deal to Bishop Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, and William Law, all mystical writers, or writers making mystical emphases. He was indebted to them for arousing his interest in inner holiness. He was forever grateful to Peter Bohler for making his heart ready to receive God's forgiving grace. We have shown that he read these writings critically, and followed the leadership of no one more than a short distance. His practical-mindedness, a reflection of the English temperament of his century, his determination to reason everything through, and to prove it by Scripture, his recourse to prayer as a means of getting guidance, made him not more than a half-disciple of classical or medieval

1

Ibid., p. 25.

mysticism at any time of his life. After the Aldersgate experience, even more definitely, upon Wesley's adoption of outdoor preaching, he put mysticism consciously behind him. Its contribution to his piety had been made.

CHAPTER III

TWO ELEMENTS IN WESLEY'S LIFE: SELF-DISCIPLINE AND THE SENSE OF DIVINE COMMISSION

A common characteristic of mysticism is its asceticism. John Wesley was often accused of being an ascetic, though, as far as we can discover, he was never called a mystic. The first section of this chapter will deal with the question: was John Wesley's self-imposed discipline reflective of mystical piety? In the second section we will endeavor to discover whether his sense of God's presence, and his conviction of divine commission were more expressive of mystical or evangelical religion.

A. Self-Discipline: Rigorism or Asceticism?

Rigorism, or stern regimentation of the habits of mind, body and soul, was not unknown in evangelical circles before Wesley's day. The Calvinistic ruling of the religious life, for example, had found expression in Geneva and elsewhere on the Continent. In England and America the Puritans were its protagonists. Asceticism, on the other hand, which stood for excessive abstinence, self-denial, and even mortification of the flesh, was confined largely to the schools of mystics. Their aim was so to persecute the physical that it would be completely subdued.

Further, the suffering thus imposed had a cleansing and redeeming feature for the soul. The underlying motive was to make atonement for physical lusts, and so to purify the inner life that union with God was not only deserved, but achieved. We want to know to which of these categories Wesley belonged.

Aside from the first basic fact that Wesley's parents came from the evangelical tradition, we see that the conditions surrounding Wesley's childhood made moderate habits, if not abstemiousness, essential. The riotous inhabitants of Asholme often destroyed Samuel Wesley's crops, killed his cattle, burned his buildings. When money and support did not materialize, Mrs. Wesley found it necessary to impose extreme frugality.

Once when the Archbishop of York asked Mrs. Wesley whether she had ever been in need of food she made answer as follows:

My Lord, I will freely own to Your Grace that strictly speaking, I never did want bread. But then I have had so much care to get it before it was eat, and to pay for it after, as has often made it very unpleasant to me. And I think to have bread on such terms is the next degree of wretchedness to having none at all.

Mrs. Wesley made it her principal business to save the souls of her children. John was the thirteenth of nineteen children, and the seventh child to survive. Only three

¹ Maximin Piette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism (New York, 1937), p. 223.

of the six born after him lived for any length of time. When a writer like Piette, says, then, that Mrs. Wesley was much more interested in the spiritual, than in the physical welfare of her children, the statement has significance for us. Her children were considered a charge "for which she was to give an account to God at the last day."

John was taught to "fear the rod and to cry softly." Three meals a day was an iron rule. The children were "certainly beat" if they tried to procure food from the servants in between times. In addition to strict dietary habits, utmost respect toward parents and each other was enforced. A first name could not be used unless prefixed with "brother" or "sister."

Family prayers, reading of the Scriptures, singing of hymns, rigid observance of the Sabbath were commonly accepted routines. In addition to teaching the children for six hours each day on secular and religious subjects, Mrs. Wesley took each for an hour of special instruction once a week. Of special interest for our paper was Mrs. Wesley's effort to transfer the children's obedience for parents to a similar obedience to the will of God.

We have already noted Wesley's mention of his "outward sins" at the Charterhouse School. Despite these, he continued to read his Bible, and to say his prayers twice daily. He attended church and maintained "a kindness for religion."

The schools of that day had a justified notoriety for barbaric savagery. The bullies often took John's meat from him. Later, he looked back with a typically philosophical temper and remarked that the enforced vegetarian diet had helped to build a robust health. He followed his father's advice to run around the garden plot at Charterhouse three times each morning.

I think Piette makes too much of the health-giving values of such a regimen, as did Wesley himself. Writers who have gone through his Journal and letters find much evidence for insisting that he did not possess the rugged, wiry physique, which has often been given as one of the secrets behind his long, strenuous years of itinerant preaching and organizing. There is much more reason for believing that he was able to hold out to the end, not because of physical resiliency, but because his powers were disciplined to their maximum efficiency. His indomitable will, tireless patience, simple tastes, and strict budgeting of time carried him through difficulties which would have broken most men. Add to all this an overmastering sense of divine mission and we have some of the clues to Wesley's greatness.¹

¹ At the age of eighty-one, Wesley said of himself that he was "as strong...but abundantly more healthy," than at the age of twenty-one. A year later he remarked, "It is almost eleven years since I felt any such thing as weariness." (See D. Baines-Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 72 f.) (Footnote 1 continued on page 52.)

Of his routine in Georgia, he wrote in the Journal:

As soon as I set foot in Georgia, I began preaching at five in the morning; and every communicant that is, every serious person in the town, constantly attended throughout the year; I mean, came every morning, winter and summer, unless in case of sickness. They did so till I left the province.¹

In the earlier years he and Charles often walked twenty miles a day. They developed the habit of one walking behind and reading aloud while the other guided their footsteps. It was not uncommon to travel for all of ten miles

(Footnote 1 from page 51 continued here:)

Despite such statements, it is possible to give an entirely different picture. I quote from Augustine Pirrell, who has an opening chapter in George Eayrs' edition of Wesley's letters:

It is a bad mistake to suppose that Wesley worked easily, or had the advantage of an iron constitution... He began life ill-equipped...His nose and lungs bled frequently while he was at Oxford. His Journal tells that he had smallpox when a child, a fever at thirty-eight, and twice later. At fifty-one he was so near death by consumption that he wrote his own epitaph.... He suffered often from cramp and what he calls a "flux." When over seventy he underwent a surgical operation, and in June 1775 he was for days "more dead than alive." Although very active and abstemious, he suffered from gout, of which his father was frequently ill and his mother died, and was attacked by it nine or ten times in thirty years. That he lived to be eighty-eight and made such an extraordinary record of service are proofs of divine assistance united with rare common sense, restraint, patience, and determination.

(Quoted from George Eayrs, Letters of John Wesley, New York, 1915, pp. 7, 8.)

¹

D. Baines-Griffiths, op. cit., p. 73.

in this fashion. It was a common procedure to hold a meeting at eight in the evening, and preach again at five in the morning. Many days Wesley preached four or five sermons. He was capable of covering all of forty miles by coach, in addition to preaching at both ends of the trip.

Following an adventure in Avalon, which involved a stiff climb to Clastonbury tower, he wrote that though being "weary enough" upon arriving at Bristol, he preached until all his "complaints" were gone, after which he found leisure to "finish the Notes on the New Testament." During a certain trip to Ireland, he was put to bed by his physician and told to remain for several days. A few hours later the doctor found him preaching to a crowd in the rain. Wesley's explanation was, "Well, I stewed some nettles and made some treacle, drank it and I am all right, I can't afford to waste time in bed."¹ At one time he advised his colleagues against "immoderate sleeping."

At sixty he once exclaimed, "Lord let me not live to be useless."² It was not until he reached the age of sixty-three that a carriage and pair of horses were presented to him. Birrell gives us this portrait of him as he travelled:

He must be pictured for many thousands of hours riding on highways and byways, the reins lying loose on his horse's neck, while his hands hold up a book to his eyes, as he was near-sighted. At his next halting-place his ever-ready pen will exercise itself

¹James K. Shields, Fifty Years in Buckles and Saddle (Newark, 1937), p. 51.

²D. Baines-Griffiths, op. cit., p. 72.

on that book in commendation, sharp criticism, or condensation for his followers; other literary matter or these letters will be written or the thousand and one tasks of a shepherd of souls and bodies will engage him. But 'who besides Wesley ever turned the saddle and the open road and the changing English skies into a permanent study?' The door of one side of his coach was mailed up, and on the inside were shelves filled with books. Attached to the front of the coach was a board which was let down and used as a desk.¹

One can hardly believe the stupendous amount of work Wesley accomplished. From his itinerary it has been estimated that he traveled two hundred and fifty thousand miles, preached fifty thousand sermons, wrote two hundred and thirty original works, edited a hundred more, and wrote thousands of letters. He covered the length and breadth of England many times, in addition to visiting Ireland and Scotland. He said at one time, "Leisure and I have taken leave of one another." Yet, he would undertake nothing which could not be done well. "Though I am always in haste," he wrote, "I am never in a hurry."

We have seen how the hardships at Epworth rectory made a frugal diet and a strict regime necessary. Mrs. Wesley instilled into her children habits of rigid self-discipline. In Charterhouse School, at Oxford, while in America, in fact, throughout his ministry, John Wesley's life was characterized by abstemiousness, the strict apportionment of time, the placing of spiritual values foremost.

¹

Eayrs, op. cit., pp. 6 f.

He was direct, tireless, steady, ready to deny himself everything which would interfere with doing the Lord's work. Samuel Johnson complained that Wesley would not sit long enough to "have his talk out." Close students of his life believe that his marital difficulties were partly the result of his failure to understand that his wife could not be expected to share the hardships to which he had become accustomed. She complained, and he rebuked her. Her spiritual passion was not as deep as his own, and he would not let marriage interfere in any manner with his calling.

Bishop McConnell believes that Wesley's prejudice against women's finery, jewelry, and other adornments, his abhorrence of public show houses, and his distrust of many common amusements, caused him to place a narrowing influence upon the lives of many Methodists. His own life was full to the brim. Many of these things held no interest for him, and suggested no temptation to lower the high tenor of his living. To impose so many of his private practices upon converts, however, was doubtless an artificial procedure, and won for Wesley a deserved notoriety in some quarters for ascetical tendencies. In his own mind these rules were, at worst, probably nothing more than the type of evangelical rigorism which he had been taught was necessary to the soul's salvation.

There are obvious ways in which he was not an ascetic in the sense practiced by mystics. He would not tolerate bodily mutilations. Self-imposed physical suffering was not the proper method of atoning for sins. He welcomed affliction as a means of spiritual growth, but these were of the sort which one found in abundance as he went about the regular performance of his Christian duties. One did not have to manufacture them.

St. Catherine was most severe in her penances, wore a hair shirt, abstained from meat and fruit, lay at night on thorns, fasted for long periods, refused herself conversation with friends. We have already remarked that Wesley called her "a fool of a saint." On the matter of refusing oneself the pleasure of social intercourse, Wesley often deprived himself of contacts which would have meant a richer, more influential career. I agree with McConnell's opinion at this point.

Someone who spoke to him of the vagabond life of the ministry received the retort that it was certainly not "pleasing to flesh and blood." He would not live as he did, Wesley maintained, were it not for his belief in "another world."

I do not think we can conclude from this that Wesley was living chiefly for a heavenly reward, that he had a morbid interest in physical austerities, nor that he wished to escape the realities of the present world. Such a statement has a definite relationship to his sense of being

divinely commissioned, a subject with which we shall be dealing presently.

For half a century or more the Methodists were regarded as a "pariah class." As late as 1809, eighteen years after Wesley's death, Reverend Sidney Smith, a fellow-churchman of Wesley's, wrote in the Edinburgh Review of "the nasty and numerous vermin of Methodism." This is indicative of injustices which Wesley stoically faced during his active ministry. For a time Methodists were considered by some to be papists in disguise. Baines-Griffiths thinks this may have arisen out of the double fact of Wesley's early interest and emphasis upon high-churchmanship, and "an asceticism of practice." This writer makes the final estimate that the "priggish virtues" of Wesley blend into the true greatness of his total personality, much as the "vigour of an oak tree always inclines us to make little of its knotted coat."

My conclusion on the matter of Wesley's self-discipline is that it is an expression of evangelical rigorism, that it is not related to mystical asceticism. His habits originated in the Epworth rectory, but they were made wholly his own as his life reached toward spiritual maturity. There was a sensible, if strenuous, purpose in all he did. His ideal was so to live and serve that "Scriptural holiness" might be spread throughout England.¹

¹
Only once did Wesley listen to the voice of tempters
(Footnote 1 continued on page 57.)

B. Wesley's Sense of Divine Commission

I have not been able to discover any essential differences between the conviction of calling which the classical mystics like Augustine and Plotius experienced, and that which possessed medieval mystics as represented by Santa Theresa, Mme. Guyon or St. John of the Cross. Neither do I see wherein John Wesley's apprehension of sonship is different from that achieved by either of these schools of mystics. It is true that Wesley did not have an ecstatic experience, nor did he believe that his spirit had become one in essence with God's Spirit. These are metaphysical distinctions, however, which have but an indirect connection to the work a man is called of God to do. He did not spend long periods in an attempt to realize a special kind of seizure by God, such as characterized the mystics. His life was constantly sensitive to the touch of the Divine Spirit. He retired for periods of prayer, reading of Scripture, and meditation, but one has the feeling that specially designated times and places were not necessary, though useful, to him. He thought about God's business from morning till night.

(Footnote 1 continued from page 57:)

who would have had him choose an easier path. Upon the urging of friends that he would do himself harm, he relaxed his discipline for a short period. The results were confided to the Journal in these words: "Very soon I didn't want to talk to anybody, had no cross to bear, invariably went to sleep in the afternoon and was regarded as a gentleman." See Shields, op. cit., p. 34.

His was a mood of constant repentance. His will remained in humble surrender before the Divine command.

Mr. Gambold, a classmate of Wesley's, has given us a valuable picture of Wesley's personal communion with God. This portrays his private practice while still at Oxford:

I could say a great deal of his private piety; how it was nourished by a continual recourse to God; and preserved by a strict watchfulness in beating down pride, and reducing the craftiness and impetuosity of nature, to a child-like simplicity; and in a good degree crowned with divine love, and victory over the whole set of earthly passions. He thought prayer to be more his business than anything else; and I have seen him come out of his closet with a serenity of countenance that was next to shining.... In all his motions he attended to the will of God.... By being always cheerful, but never triumphing, he so husbanded the secret consolations which God gave him, that they seldom left him, and never but in a state of strong and long-suffering faith....there were in him no idle cravings, no chagrin or fickleness of spirit, nothing but the genuine wants of the body to be relieved by outward accomodations and refreshments....In short, he used many endeavors to be religious, but none to seem so; with zeal always upon the stretch, and a most transparent sincerity, he addicted himself to every good word and work.¹

Heiler would call this evangelical or prophetic prayer, a picture of evangelical religion at its best. Rufus Jones would argue for the term evangelical mysticism in this connection. I think the latter term is preferable.

Wesley was able to see God's providential guiding in all the turns of his career. The Unseen Hand guided

¹ John Whitehead, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley (Boston, 1844), Vol. I, pp. 304-308.

his embarking for America. It was God who sent Peter Bohler to him. By the mercies of God's grace he was persuaded to attend the Aldersgate meeting. Providence was behind his trip to Herrnhutt. The Divine Spirit was behind the whole mode and method of the evangelical revival. When the Colonists broke from England politically and religiously, he accepted it as a business beyond his understanding, but, nevertheless, according to God's purpose.

Even the smallest matters were significant when life was viewed from Wesley's standpoint:

It is hardly credible of how great consequence before God the smallest things are; and what great inconveniences sometimes follow those which appear to be light faults....

We should be continually laboring to cut off all the useless things that surround us; and God usually retrenches the superfluities of our souls in the same proportions as we do those of our bodies.¹

Wesley associates God's will with all his deepest convictions. His untiring emphasis upon holiness, for example, was part of living out the commands of God. He was wise enough to recognize the creature's tendency toward sinning, even after Grace had once filled a man's soul. Watchfulness and prayer were enjoined, therefore, as part and parcel of the process of salvation. The following statement is typical:

It is good to renew ourselves from time to time,

¹

Wesley, Christian Perfection, pp. 160 ff.

by closely examining the state of our souls, as if we had never done it before, for nothing tends more to the full assurance of faith than to keep ourselves by this means in humility, and the exercise of all good works.¹

The point we need to make is that his interest in holiness was first aroused by mystical teachings. As he taught and practiced it, mixed as it was with his evangelical rigorism, it became a revitalizing, evangelical emphasis.

One of the central beliefs of Wesley was that God had guided his rescue from the burning home at Epworth when he was six years of age. Ever afterward, he referred to himself as "a brand plucked from the burning." When he escaped from emotional entanglements with Miss Sophy Hopkey in Savannah, he referred to himself as "once more snatched out of the fire." On Friday, February 9, 1750, Wesley made this entry in his Journal:

We had a comfortable watch-night at the chapel. About eleven o'clock it came into my mind that this was the very day and hour in which, forty years ago, I was taken out of the flames. I stopped and gave a short account of that wonderful providence. The voice of praise and thanksgiving went up on high, and great was our rejoicing before the Lord.²

It was three years later that, believing that his end was near, he composed the following epitaph in order to prevent "vile panegyric:"

¹ Ibid., p. 162.

² Wesley, Journal, Standard edition, Vol. III, pp. 454 f.

Here lieth the Body

of

JOHN WESLEY

a brand plucked out of the burning:

who died of a consumption in the fifty-first year of his age,

not leaving, after his debts are paid,

ten pounds behind him:

praying

God to be merciful to me, an unprofitable servant!

Once more we see combined the sense of special Providence blending with the smaller matters of daily habit. It was his conviction, for instance, that God's will for the Christian related to the stewardship of body, mind, soul and possessions. We will say more later concerning Wesley's teachings regarding the use of money.

Nothing I have read better expresses Wesley's view of his own life work than a statement written by himself forty years after leaving Oxford:

Two young men, without a name, without friends, without either power or fortune, set out from college with principles totally different from those of the common people, to oppose all the world, learned and unlearned; and to combat popular prejudices of every kind. Their first principle directly attacked all the wickedness; their second, all the bigotry in the world. Thus they attempted a reformation, not of opinions (feathers, trifles not worth naming), but of men's tempers and lives; of vice in every kind; of everything contrary to justice, mercy or truth. And for this it was, that they carried their lives in their hands; and that both the great vulgar and the small looked upon them as mad dogs, and

treated them as such.¹

The above passage does not sound as if it came from the pen of a mystic. Its general tone is rational and realistic, wholesomely concerned with the evils of the world which need remedying. There is nothing of poetic imagery or excessive emotion in Wesley's plain words. We have here a stern facing of the cost of discipleship, but it reflects nothing of an unhealthy desire to suffer, has no suggestion of a martyrdom complex. The mystics are likely to sound a jubilant note in their sufferings, to engage in flights of imagery, to touch all with pulsations of emotion. In contrast, Wesley demonstrates the balanced, thoughtful approach of the religious statesman, the executive who not only has his own work to tend, but who must see that others are properly directed.

While I would agree with Rufus Jones in placing Wesley's call and sense of God's guidance within the category of evangelical mysticism, what Wesley says of himself in relation to medieval mysticism is clear and to the point. His words follow:

It is true that, for awhile, I admired the mystic writers. But I dropped them, even before I went to Georgia; long before I knew or suspected anything as to justification by faith. Therefore all that follows of my 'making my system of divinity more commodious for general use,' having no foundation, falls to the ground at once. I never

¹

Wesley, Works, Vol. XII, pp. 461 f. Also, cf. Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley, p. 107.

was 'in the way of mysticism' at all.¹

C. Summary

Wesley's self-discipline was an outgrowth of evangelical rigorism, and did not reflect mystical asceticism. From the teachings of his mother, and from the frugalities necessitated by the poverty of his Epworth home, he learned early the meaning of abstemiousness. Very early he developed an unusual sense of the value of time. His manner of living was, to his thinking, commanded by God's Law, as revealed in the Scriptures. Thus, in placing obedience at the heart of his conduct, he remained more objective in his relationship to God than the mystics who constantly tried to achieve union with the Divine Spirit.

His sense of divine commission might have been either evangelical or mystical, as far as subjective conviction went. It was his methodical application of God's will to the smallest details of living, and the emphasis upon all as the road to salvation which distinguished him from the mystics. God went with him into everyday affairs. He thought of God in terms of his work, as much or more than in terms of inner feelings and emotional compulsions. This objectivity was unlike the more subjective attitude of the mystic.

¹

Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley, p. 54.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIBLE AS MEDIATOR

There were three elements in Wesley's teachings which afford a good background against which to study the differences between his approach to religion and that used by the medieval mystics. One is the use of the Bible as mediator, another justification and sanctification through faith, and lastly, the ethical outreach of his message. To each of these a separate chapter will be devoted. This present chapter will discuss the first of these three elements.

The mystics of the Christian faith used their Bibles, and received much help from them. Often they would read favorite passages when beginning their meditations. They sought in the Scriptures for spiritual food, and found it. Tauler's sermons, as interpreted for us by Rufus Jones, reveal a vital interest in the Bible, and show keen insights into Scriptural meanings.

While it is true that the mystics used the Bible as a tool, as a valuable reference, it was not their final authority. They were not primarily concerned to prove the validity of their approach to God by quoting specific texts or by reference to Biblical truths. The final authority for the mystic was the conclusion reached as he or she

"recollected in tranquility" the meaning of the union with God. There were no words, Biblical or otherwise (the Songs of Solomon might be a possible exception), capable of capturing the glories of an ecstatic experience. Nothing but the extravagant, erotic language of love-making could approximate the feelings of St. Marguerite Marie, for example, as she "reposed" for "long" periods upon the "divine breast" of her "Sovereign Master." One who interprets mysticism as sympathetically as Rufus Jones admits that the mystic was an individualist, going his own way, with little regard for traditional modes of grace, too impatient to dig out religious meanings through rigorous intellectual application either to life or to the Bible. Generally they were indifferent to the implications of historical research. A mystic could have inner purity now through strenuous moral discipline; he could have God for himself immediately through the "pilgrimage of the soul" across the mysterious hinterlands to the "Wholly Other." Royce has called mysticism the ¹ only purely empirical approach to God.

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From an evangelical point of view, classical and medieval mysticism are too "puristic" in their insistence upon a special kind of experience. The "purist" trout fisherman, to use a rough illustration from another field, will use nothing but dry flies, a tapered line, a special automatic reel. On this account he has a narrower experience, misses many catches than the more versatile sportsman who will condescend to employ bait, spinners and wet flies. In a similar sense, the mystic who overlooks the revelation (Footnote 1 continued on page 67.)

Emil Brunner criticizes mysticism severely at this point. It is his contention that neither John of the Fourth Gospel nor Paul were mystics, because they believed that the "supreme thing" was faith, "faith in a personal Mediator of revelation and of salvation." The Bible, in turn, since it contains the words of Christ, is the divine literary mediator for the Christian.

He defines mysticism as "that form of religion in which the immediacy of the soul's union with God is the constitutive element." He insists in refutation of Deissmann, that the opposite of mysticism is not "rational," (he believes the mystics have been on good terms with the philosophers) but "believing, namely, believing the Word of God, which most emphatically is not 'the deposit of mystical experiences.' " Brunner goes on to the point that the difference between experiencing truth mystically

(Footnote 1 continued from page 66:)

of God through history, who casts aside the spiritual and intellectual disciplines implied in searching for God in the Scriptures, and who, except for an occasional "nature mystic" remains insensitive to the touch of God's immanence, misses many of the aspects of religious experience. He overdoes the feeling element, at the expense of rational historical, moral and ethical phases of spiritual development.

and believing it by faith may be expressed as follows:

.....we need only remind ourselves of the significance of the Word of God in the Old Testament to Paul --incomprehensible but very definite and clear self-revelation of God, which is not to be experienced mystically, but is to be believed, whereby this faith is a far more personal relation and far more remote from that which is merely rational, than mystical experience. In the Bible the definite Word of God, and the definite statement about Christ, does not imply--as Deissmann says it does--a process of 'dogmatic vivisection', a 'petrification,' a 'doctrine,' but a particularly great gift of God. Otherwise why did Luther take such infinite pains to trace out the exact meaning of the very words of Scripture? An 'inward' faith is a right faith; hence it is not mystical--although now and again it may be accompanied by mystical experience.¹

Brunner puts his finger on the point of greatest controversy between medieval mysticism and a religion of meditation. To the mystic and the rationalist, he says, the one thing which causes the most offence "in the Christian faith" is that faith should be bound "to something external, the Church, and to its preaching....to its sermon and its sacrament, to the Biblical Word....to the historical event, which is held fast in the creed--'Crucified under Pontius Pilate.'²"

In the Middle Ages and during the Reformation, Brunner finds that mysticism and "spiritualism" were opposing the evangelical faith of mediacy. Within the last three hundred years, the "triumph of reason" had brought

¹ Emil Brunner, The Mediator (New York, 1934), pp. 176 f. (note).

² Emil Brunner, God and Man (London, 1936), p. 125.

it into contempt. He feels that this is a factor in the "dissolution of the community," because mediacy "be-tokens" the "bond of the individual to the community."¹

Brunner's quotations have immediate relevance for us in that they emphasize the difference between the mystical approach to God, in which the Bible is but an incidental stimulus, and the evangelistic approach to God which makes the Bible the center of the revelation which is sought. John Wesley belongs definitely in the latter classification.

What Brunner says about the centrality of faith, a Lutheran emphasis, suggests the line of thought we shall present in the next section when we review Wesley's teachings on justification and sanctification through faith.

If we may say, in general, that the central drives of the medieval mystics were inner purity and union in love with God, in contrast, Wesley's primary emphases were "Scriptural holiness," and "Scriptural Christianity." If someone proposed a new thought or a different approach, Wesley's inevitable question was, "Can it be proven by the Scriptures?" To the extent that he was consciously consistent in his teaching, he based every belief, finally, in God's Word. The doctrines of perfection, justification and sanctification by faith were, in his mind, the clearest and truest expositions of the Scriptural salvation.

¹
Ibid., p. 126.

The mystics' approach he thought neither Scriptural nor Christian.¹ Even though Wesley's belief in man's complete helplessness without God approaches the mystical evaluation of human nature, it comes still closer to his mother's thought about man as expressed in her correspondence with Wesley on the subject of predestination. He supports his anthropology by quotations from Paul. It might be remarked, in passing, that Wesley's doctrines were more Pauline than Johannine or Petrine. It seems to me they reflect more the letters of Paul than the teachings contained in the Synoptics. This would make an interesting study, in itself.

All we have been saying leads to the statement that Wesley found in the Bible the final mediator of God's will, whereas the mystic found God in direct experience. If this be followed through, however, we find that most mystics were not unfriendly to the theology and the metaphysic in which they were raised. The Christian mystics had

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Herrmann, like Wesley, puts mysticism and "Christianity" in opposition to each other. Both Church dogma and mysticism stand in the way of faith, he thinks. He argues that a faith in the historical Jesus is "incomparably richer than any feelings which arise within ourselves." This makes us certain of God. Through reason and conscience, which act as judges, "our conviction is only confirmed that we are in communion with Him." See Wilhelm Herrmann, The Communion of the Christian with God (London, 1895), pp. 28-31.

the Catholic doctrine of the Scriptures in their religious backgrounds. However much they may have missed the fuller means of grace, the mystics were not deliberately or knowingly anti-Biblical or anti-Christian. They would have been horrified at such suggestions. God and Christ were, to them, the central realities of this life and the next. They can justly be accused of narrowness, extravagance in language, and of an individualism unfit for wide application. Yet, they have a definite and permanent contribution to make on the experiential side of religion. For the purity of their lives, and the consecration of their wills and talents, they deserve the titles of "saints." If they overdid the element of love, in order that they might be dominated by it, we must recognize that the core of their instinct was sound. Love will always be the central word wherever the Christian gospel is preached.

Nothing more clearly portrays Wesley's reliance upon the Bible than the fact that he referred to himself as Homo de Libre Uno, "a man of one book." In writing to his mother on November 10, 1725, he referred to his implicit faith concerning the Scriptures in these words:

Nay, the more you study on that subject, the more reason you will find to depend on the veracity of God: inasmuch as your perception of Him will be clearer, and you will more plainly discover the congruity there is between the ordinances and precepts of the gospel, and right reason. Nor is it an hard matter to prove the whole system of Christianity is founded thereon.¹

¹

Quoted by Piette, op. cit., pp. 262 f. The italics are mine.

Another letter to his mother, written earlier the same year, shows Wesley's dependence upon reason as an instrument in Scriptural interpretation, and the close relationship he sees between faith and rational processes. He virtually claims that faith can be resolved into reason:

As I understand faith to be an assent to any truth upon rational grounds, I do not think it possible, without perjury, to swear I believe anything, unless I have rational grounds for my persuasion....

I call faith an assent upon rational grounds; because I hold Divine testimony to be the most reasonable of all evidence whatever. Faith must necessarily, at length, be resolved into reason. God is true, therefore what he says is true. When anyone can bring me more reasonable propositions than these, I am ready to assent to them: till then, it will be highly unreasonable to change my opinion.¹

The temperament shown by this quotation departs radically from mysticism. The underlined portions show his belief that the Bible contains God's testimony, that this testimony is reasonable, and therefore, faith itself must be reasonable. Many mystics before and after Wesley would have been impatient with the persistence by which he held belief and statement under the stern eye of intellectual scrutiny. Baron von Hugel refers to Wesley as "the man of absolute judgments," and Paul Elmer More, in one of his Shelburne Essays refers to the "evangelical absolutism," of Methodism's founder. In addition to

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Piette, op. cit., pp. 255 f. The italics are mine.

² Von Hugel, The Mystical Element in Religion, Vol. II, p. 4 (note).

being endowed with a "relentlessly logical mind," this gift was trained through his mother's influence, and through his special work in logic at Oxford.¹ It is not surprising, therefore, to find Wesley combining the Scriptures with faith and reason as the foundation upon which to build and spread Christianity.²

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D. Baines-Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 19, 20.

2

Despite Wesley's high opinion of logic and reasoned religion, we find a strain of superstition mixed into the complex of his thinking. In regard to the Bible, it is found in his habit of opening the Scriptures haphazardly, in an effort to find guidance from the words therein, suddenly presented to his sight.

On the day of his Aldersgate experience, he chanced upon the following passages which were to him signs of revelation from God:

II Peter 1:4, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature."

Mark 12:34b, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

When facing the necessity of accepting or rejecting outdoor preaching, he happened upon a verse containing the injunction, "Get thee up into the mountain." On the day following Wesley's escape from the burning rectory at Epworth, his father picked from among the ruins a polyglot Bible on which only these words were legible: 'Vade, vende omnia quae habes et attolle crucem, et sequere me!' To the whole family, these words were as if they had been spoken to them directly from heaven. No doubt, part of Wesley's success in finding wise counsel through this process was due to his unusual familiarity with the Holy Book. His was an exceptional memory. He was able to read both Old and New Testaments in their original tongues. He made a special practice of memorizing and quoting passages which he thought were related. My theory is that subconsciously he was many times guided to familiar portions of the Bible, whose general or specific location he knew beforehand.

In one volume of Wesley's Works I came across his comments on Baron Swedenborg, and the latter's claim to have had a special revelation of a mystical sort. Wesley's comments show clearly how differently his mind worked, when dealing with the Scriptures, from the erratic method of a mystic:

From the whole I remark, that what Mr. Law oddly imputes to Sir Isaac Newton is truly imputable to the Baron: He 'ploughed with Jacob Behmen's (Boehme's) heifer,' and that both in philosophy and divinity. But he far exceeds his master: His dreams are more extraordinary than those of Jacob himself." 1

After reviewing the Baron's interpretations, Wesley makes comments, of which these lines are typical:

Can any person of common understanding defend any of these expositions? Are they not so utterly absurd, so far removed from all shadow of reason, that, instead of pronouncing them the dictates of the Holy Ghost, we cannot but judge them to be whims of a distempered imagination? A thousand more, equally absurd, are to be found in all his writings.

Be this a specimen of the Baron's skill in expounding the Scriptures? Come we now to his memorable Visions and Revelations.

Any serious man may observe, that many of these are silly and childish to the last degree; that many others are amazingly odd and whimsical; many palpably absurd, contrary to all sound reason; and many more, contrary, not only to particular texts, but to the whole tenor, of Scripture. 2

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John Wesley, Works, Vol. XIII (London, 1831), p. 389.

2 Ibid., pp. 390 f.

In one volume of Westley's Works, I ran across his
comments on Baron Swedeborg and his claim to have had a
special revelation of a

Even more specific and of special value to the point we are making is the following:

To those who affirm, with Jacob Behmen (Boehme), the Baron, and most of the Mystics, that there is no wrath in God, permit me to recommend the consideration of only one more passage of Scripture: 'And the Kings of the earth, and the great men, and every bondman, and every freeman, said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' (Rev. vi 15-17.) Here I would ask, (1) Is not 'He that sitteth on the throne' distinct from 'the Lamb'? (2) Is not 'the Lamb' Jesus Christ? God and man? (3) Is no wrath ascribed to Him in these words? Who but a madman can deny it? And if there was no wrath in the Lamb, what were all these afraid of? a shadow that never had any real existence? Would the Baron have told them, 'It is extravagant folly to suppose that God can be angry at all?' ¹

What stronger conclusion to the matter could one wish than this:

But the Scripture says, 'God is not a man.' Which shall I believe? the Bible or the Baron?

This is my grand objection to the Baron's whole system relative to the invisible world; that it is not only quite unconnected with Scripture, but quite inconsistent with it. It strikes at the very foundation of Scripture. If this stands, the Bible must fall.²

Though liberal for his day, and remarkably open to suggestion, it is interesting to note that Wesley did not fully embrace the analytical attitude toward the Scriptures which his father adopted. Samuel Wesley tried, without avail, to interest John in Biblical criticism, at the time of his son's ordination, and even afterward.

¹Ibid., pp. 395 f. The italics are mine.

²Ibid., pp. 397 f.

Though never adopting this point of view, Wesley fulfilled his father's last wish and subsequently delivered his parent's Dissertations on the Book of Job to Queen Caroline. Wesley studied the Old and New Testaments in Hebrew and Greek, but never assayed to produce material which represented his original research. Rather, as Piette points out, his writings on the New Testament are largely a translation and condensation of authors he ¹ consulted. Bengel was the writer he chiefly used.

Wesley wrote in the introduction to Explanatory Notes on the New Testament that the work was not intended for "men of learning," nor even for those "of long and deep experience into the ways and word of God." From the latter he felt that he could himself learn much. The audience for which the New Testament Notes was intended was made up of "plain unlettered men, who understand only their mother-tongue, and yet reverence and love the word of God, and have a desire to save their souls."² A "Deep sense" of his inability to do an adequate piece of work had long kept him from getting at the task. It was the combination of a sickness, plus the sense of the average man's need which finally decided him.

When one remembers that his attitude toward textual

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Piette, op. cit., pp. 290, 434, 435.

²

Ibid., p. 431.

criticism was developed nearly two hundred years ago, he reads with amazement of the careful, yet practical attitude in which Wesley worked, as expressed by the following points:

4. In order to assist these in such a measure as I am able, I design, first, to set down the text itself, for the most part, in the common English translation, which is, in general (so far as I can judge), abundantly the best I have seen. Yet I do not say it is incapable of being brought, in several places, nearer the original. Neither will I affirm, that the Greek copies from which this translation was made, are always the most correct: and therefore I shall take the liberty, as occasion may require, to make here and there a small alteration.

5. I am very sensible this will be liable to objection; nay, to the objections of quite opposite kinds. Some will probably think the text is altered too much; and others, that it is altered too little. To the former I would observe, that I have never knowingly, so much as in one place, altered it for altering's sake; but there, and there only, where, first, the sense was made better, stronger, clearer, or more consistent with the context; secondly, where the sense being equally good, the phrase was better and nearer the original. To the latter, who think the alterations too few, and that the translation might have been nearer still, I answer, This is true; I acknowledge it might. But what valuable end would it have answered, to multiply such trivial alterations, as add neither clearness nor strength to the text? This I could not prevail upon myself to do; so much so the less, because there is, to my apprehension, I know not what peculiarly solemn and venerable in the old language of our translation. And suppose this to be a mistaken apprehension, and an instance of human infirmity; yet is it not an excusable infirmity, to be unwilling to part with what we have been long accustomed to, and to love the very words, by which God has often conveyed strength or comfort to our souls?

6. I have endeavoured to make the Notes as short as possible, that the comment may not obscure or

swallow up the text; and as plain as possible, in pursuance of my main design, to assist the unlearned reader. For this reason I have studiously avoided, not only all curious and critical inquiries, and all use of the learned languages, but all such methods of reasoning, and modes of expression, as people in common life are unacquainted with. For the same reason, as I rather endeavour to obviate than to propose and answer objections, so I purposely decline going deep into many difficulties, lest I should leave the ordinary reader behind me.¹

A special attitude toward the Scriptures here stated which is typically evangelical but non-mystical, is Wesley's reverence for tradition. He is loath to make any changes in language whose connotation has been a source of spiritual food for Christians. This is a reflection of this man's high churchmanship, his natural conservatism, plus his deep concern for religious values.

Summary

We have seen that Wesley departed from the mystics of the Middle Ages in several respects, considered from the standpoint of the Bible's place in Wesley's teaching as contrasted with its place in the mystics' beliefs. Our findings may be restated something like this:

1. Wesley was a "Man of One Book" in so far as the Bible meant the final reference in Christian doctrine and practice. The Bible to the mystics, on the other hand, was used as a stimulus to meditation, and as a book containing spiritual food. Their final authority lay in the intensity of their experiences, plus their interpretations of those

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John Wesley, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament (New York, 1839), pp. 3-6. Also cf. Piette, op. cit., pp. 430-432.

experiences "recollected in tranquility."

2. The mystics interpreted the Scriptures to support their monism, and other special prejudices. Wesley, on the other hand, took a more objective, more scholarly attitude, giving an interpretation quite advanced for his day, in many respects.

3. Wesley wanted to make the Scriptures available for the common man, and devoted himself to making this dream a reality. The mystics were more concerned with spreading (to the extent that they became objective in their religion) a particular type of immediate experience of God and Christ. The Bible was incidental to this aim.

4. Wesley stood for a broader, more inclusive type of religious experience, the basis of which he discovered in the Bible. The mystics stood for a narrower, exclusive kind of experience, supported by Scripture, at the expense of misinterpretation, or by avoiding qualifying or contrary portions.

It is possible to go one step further, and maintain that Wesley's use of the Scriptures fostered a type of religious experience among Methodists which could be called "evangelical mysticism," in short, an experience of the Divine upon or within human life, through the Bible as mediator.

CHAPTER V

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

Soon after meeting Peter Bohler, John Wesley preached a sermon on "Salvation through Faith," which was virtually his Christian Manifesto. From the principles there enunciated he never departed, although he enlarged their concepts. Later, he preached a sermon entitled "The Scripture-way of Salvation."¹ It develops somewhat more in detail certain aspects of salvation such as the relationship between good works and faith.

We are interested in these two sermons, or more specifically, in their ideas, because it was in the realm of faith and its implications that Wesley clashed with the Moravians, with William Law, and with the Quakers. By reviewing what he wrote against each of these, as their teachings conflicted with his notions of justification and sanctification through faith, we can go a few steps further in understanding just how his piety differed from that advocated by mystical sects.

A. Wesley's Objections to the Moravians

From early life, Wesley had been warned against what Tyerman calls "the papistical error of laying too much

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"Salvation by Faith" is Sermon I in his series of fifty-three, and "The Scripture-Way of Salvation" is numbered XLIII. See John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions (New York, 1854), Vol. I.

stress on outward works," or "the popish doctrine of salvation by works."¹ Reading Lutheran and Calvinistic authors reinforced this bias. Perhaps Tyerman is right in calling these latter works, "confused and indigested expositions" which "magnified faith to such an amazing size that it quite hid all the rest of the commandments."² In any event, it was true that Wesley found himself confronted on one side by the Charybdis of activism, and on the other by the Scylla of quietism. The latter, represented through the Moravians, he could reconcile neither with Scripture nor with common sense.

Something of his aversion to them is seen in an introductory statement which he made to his review of the differences between their doctrines and those taught by himself and his brother Charles. These are his words:

As those who are under the direction of Count Zinzendorf (vulgarly called Moravian Brethren) are the most plausible, and therefore far the most dangerous, of all the Antinomians now in England, I first endeavour to guard such as are simple of heart against being taken by those cunning hunters.³

We offer, now a brief survey of the points which Wesley attacked in the teachings perpetuated at Herrnhut.

I

Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley, Vol.

I, p. 185.

2

Ibid., p. 185.

3

John Wesley, Works, Vol. X, p. 201.

They believe and teach:

1. That Christ had done all which was necessary for the salvation of all mankind.

His answer: Christ had not done all which was necessary for "absolute" salvation. Men must believe in his merits, and have a faith "that worketh by love." This is "conditional" salvation.

2. That, consequently, we are to do nothing, as necessary to salvation, but simply to believe in him.

There were two objections to this. (1) Count Zinzen-dorf taught that Christ had been a man and suffered death for us. Wesley wants faith in Christ to include much more than this. (2) He favors intensive, consistent human effort. In the later sermon on "The Scripture Way of Salvation," he writes:

God does undoubtedly command us both to repent, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance: which if we willingly neglect, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all.¹

3. That there is but one duty, now, but one command, viz., to believe in Christ.

Wesley replies that "Almost every page in the New Testament proves the falsehood of this assertion."

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John Wesley, Sermon XLIII from Sermons on Several Occasions, Vol. I, (New York, 1854), pp. 384-391. Wesley here qualifies the "fruits meet for repentance" by saying that they are not necessary in the same sense, nor in the same degree to salvation as is faith. The fruits are necessary conditionally "if there be time and opportunity for them." Repentance, likewise, is unavailing until accompanied with belief. He draws still a finer distinction by saying that repentance and fruits are remotely necessary for faith, while faith is immediately and directly necessary to justification.

4. Christ has taken away all other commands and duties, having wholly abolished the law.

Against this Wesley sets Christ's statement that he came not to destroy but to fulfill. We are never free from the law of God. The commands of God we must keep. It is a monstrosity to make void this law through a certain teaching about faith.

5. We are sanctified wholly the moment we are justified, and are neither more nor less holy to the day of our death; entire sanctification and entire justification being in one and the same instant.

Scripture and experience deny both, Wesley asserts. In many places throughout his sermons and writings, Wesley admits the possibility of instantaneous sanctification, but admits that for the average Christian it is a gradual, lifelong process. Backsliding is possible for either group.¹

6. A believer is never sanctified or holy in himself, but in Christ only. He has no holiness in himself at all; all his holiness being imputed, not inherent.

Wesley's argument runs that just as temperance cannot be imputed to a drunkard or chastity to a prostitute, in the sense that neither of these virtues are part of their natures, in a like manner, scriptural holiness is more than an imputation. Man is made in the image of God, and his holy tempers within, even though he was not the author of

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By justification Wesley means pardon or forgiveness. Sanctification begins at the same moment, and signifies the removal of sin from the life, being made "perfect in love." This perfection refers to the attitude and purpose of love, and does not imply that one will be without flaw in judgment or free from ignorance.

them. Wesley's final thrust at this view is a mortal one:

And indeed, if holiness in general be the mind which was in Christ, what can any one possibly mean by, "A believer is not holy in himself, but in Christ only; that the mind which was in Christ is in a believer also; but it is in Him--not in himself, but in Christ!" What a heap of palpable self-contradiction, what senseless jargon is this!

7. If a man regards prayer, or searching the Scriptures, or communicating, as a matter of duty; or he judges himself obliged to do these things, or is troubled not, he is "in bondage", he has no faith at all, but is seeking salvation by the works of the law.

Wesley's retort is hard to improve:

Thus obedience with you is a proof of unbelief, and disobedience a proof of faith! What is it, to put darkness for light, and light for darkness, if this is not?¹

We could spend an indefinite period trying to show the possible limitations of Wesley's replies to the Moravians, and in giving our own critical analysis of their differences in fuller detail. For our purpose it will suffice to realize that Wesley, in his own thinking parted definitely and sharply from the way of mystical quietism. To the best of his knowledge of the Scriptures, and according to his knowledge of the way in which religion transforms men's lives, he refuted the teachings of Count Zinsendorf and his school.

The main point in which our interest centers is that Wesley insisted upon the place for moral effort and good

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John Wesley, The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M. Third Edition, Vol. X, (London, 1830. "An Extract from "A Short View of the Difference Between the Moravian Brethren, (so called) and the Rev. Mr. John and Charles Wesley," pp. 201-204.

works. Anything smacking of antinomianism aroused his indignation at once. Some liberal thinkers today might feel that on the whole, he gave too large a place to Grace, and credited man with an unnecessary degree of helplessness. This takes us off on another line of argument with which we cannot be directly concerned. To summarize, Wesley's doctrine of salvation, including justification and sanctification through faith, was quite unlike the salvation through faith preached by those belonging to the school of quietistic mysticism. Wesley believed that his teaching squared with the doctrines of the Church of England. Regardless of this point they were evangelical in their emphases.¹

B. Wesley Challenges Law

William Law, as we have seen, was more instrumental than any other writer in guiding Wesley toward a concern for inner holiness. After his contacts with Peter Bohler, and shortly following the Aldersgate experience, in which he felt that through the exercise of faith his sins had been forgiven, Wesley turned upon his former spiritual mentor, chiding him severely for not having taught the place of faith in the operation of God's grace. Nothing more than a summary of this correspondence is necessary to show clearly

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Overton gives us an enlightening discussion upon the manner in which Wesley tried to square his teachings of justification and the new birth with "the plain teaching of the Church on Holy Baptism as the Sacrament of Regeneration." Its details need not be reviewed here. John Henry Overton, The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century, (New York, 1900), pp. 189 f.

how Wesley differed from a type of mysticism which neglected faith, but pinned its hope on holiness and the way of the cross.

Wesley's first letter to Law was written as a result of what he considered to be the call of God. He informed Law that for two years he had been preaching the contents of Serious Call and Christian Perfection. The results were satisfactory in that people were convinced that the law of God was holy, but they found themselves without power to fulfill it. Wesley, himself, was in this state, and might have groaned in it till death, had he not met Peter Bohler. Wesley continues:

Now, sir, suffer me to ask, how will you answer it to our common Lord, that you never gave me this advice? Did you never read the Acts of the Apostles, or the answer of Paul to him who said, "What must I do to be saved?" Or are you wiser than he? Why did I scarce ever hear you name the name of Christ? Never so as to ground anything upon faith in His blood? Who is this who is laying another foundation? If you say you advised other things as preparatory to this, what is this but laying a foundation below a foundation; if you say you advised them because you knew that I had faith already, verily you knew nothing of me. I know that I had not faith, unless the faith of a devil, the faith of Judas: that speculative, notional airy shadow, which lives in the head not in the heart. But what is this to the living, justifying faith in the blood of Jesus? The faith that cleanseth from sin, that gives us to have free access to the Father; to rejoice in hope of the glory of God; to have the love of God and shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us, and the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God?¹

¹ Journal, Standard Edition, Vo. VIII, p. 319 f. Tyerman has a good discussion of this controversy in his Life and

Wesley's ire having been aroused, he added insult to poor taste by asking Law if his "extreme roughness, and morose and sour behaviour...on many occasions" could have been "the fruit of a living faith in Christ?"

In his reply, Law was justly sarcastic of Wesley's sense of divine compulsion behind the younger man's letter. The following quotations will be sufficient to show wherein lay the emphases of Law to which Wesley objected:

I have been governed through all that I have written and done by these two common, fundamental, unchangeable maxims of our Lord: "Without Me ye can do nothing: If any man will come after Me or be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me." If you are for separating the doctrine of the cross from faith in Christ, or following Him, you have numbers and names enough on your side, but not me.¹

Law advised Wesley against accepting a new doctrine upon insufficient grounds in these words:

If you had only this faith till some weeks ago, let me advise you not to be too hasty in believing that, because you have changed your language or expressions, you have changed your faith. The head can as easily amuse itself with a living and justifying faith in the blood of Jesus, as with any other notion; and the heart which you suppose to be a place of security as being the seat of self-love, is more deceitful than the head.²

Only two other points in this correspondence need concern us. Peter Bohler had reported to Wesley that in an

Footnote continued from last page:
Times of the Rev. John Wesley, pp. 185-188. The differences between the emphases of the two men is presented with clarity and comprehension in Flew, R. Newton, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology, pp. 293-341.

¹

Ibid., p. 321.

²

Ibid., p. 322 f.

attempted conversation with Law, the latter had avoided the topic of faith in Christ and had insisted upon talking about "mystical matters." Wesley laid this charge at Law's door, only to receive the reply: "Is not faith in Jesus Christ the very sum and substance of what is meant by mystical religion?"¹ To Wesley's mind, faith in Jesus Christ meant more than taking up one's cross, more than striving after inner holiness, more than a realization that we can do nothing without Christ, though he would have excluded none of these. It meant the power by which man in his natural state, is lifted and transformed until he knows that he has been forgiven; that he is, finally, a son of God. Hence, he would deny Law's identification of mysticism with faith in Christ. The faith he had found was, in his own mind, outside the teaching of the mystics.

The final point we should notice is brought out in Wesley's last letter to Law, which closed the correspondence between them at that time. We quote one sentence: "You recommended books to me which had no tendency to this faith, but a direct one to destroy good works."²

1. In addition to holiness, the Cross, and a sense of man's need of Christ, Wesley felt that Law could have helped his disciples find the power necessary to walk the way of life he advocated, by teaching salvation through grace.

I

Ibid., p. 323.

2

Ibid., p. 324.

2. "Mystical matters", are not identical with nor correlate of, faith in Christ.

3. Law's teaching made works of little account, and the writings he recommended made the same emphasis.

The second point above, relates directly to our debate over terms. Heiler would argue that "mystical matters" are synonymous with those of prophetic or evangelical religion. Many cautious scholars including Heiler, himself admit that faith has an element of the mystical in it, though they will go no further. The contention of this paper is that there was a strong core of evangelical mysticism in Wesley's personal experience of salvation, and that a similar experience was engendered in the converts which Methodism made during the Evangelical Revival. It is important to remember that our conclusions upon the matter do not coincide with Wesley's.

C. Wesley and Quakerism

We have said so much about the good elements of the Friends with special reference to Rufus Jones, that it is appropriate to inquire how the mind of Wesley reacted to this sect. Material can be drawn from a letter written to one of the Methodists who had his membership to the Quakers. It was written from Bristol, and bears the date of February 10, 1747-1748. In it Wesley states the tenets of Quakerism as taught by Robert Barclay, indicating which in his judgment agree with, and which depart from Christianity.

1. Seeing the height of all happiness is placed in the true knowledge of God, the right understanding of this is what is most necessary to be known in the first place.¹

2. It is by the Spirit alone that the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be, revealed. And these revelations, which are absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith, neither do, nor can, ever contradict right reason or the testimony of the Scriptures.²

Upon these two points, Wesley is in hearty accord with Quakerism. As we have seen "right reason" and the "testimony of the scriptures" are concepts which he thinks must accompany faith in order to make it mean anything. He departs from Quakerism when it "asserts that special revelations are not to be subjected to scriptural examination." For Wesley, all revelations "real or supposed" must appeal "to the law and to the testimony." Every "spirit" must be tried thereby.

3. From these revelations of the Spirit of God to the saints, have proceeded the Scriptures of truth.³

Wesley agrees with this, but as the statement enlarges to stipulate that not the Scriptures, but the Spirit is the principal ground of spiritual truth, he insists upon a qualification. To him the Spirit is "our guide, which signifies an "intelligent being."⁴

¹

John Wesley, Works, "A Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the People Called Quakers," p. 177.

²

Ibid., pp. 177, 178.

³

Ibid., p. 178.

4. All mankind is fallen and dead, deprived of the sensation of this inward testimony of God, and subject to the power and nature of the devil, while they abide in their natural state. And hence not only their words and deeds, but all their imaginations, are evil perpetually in the sight of God.¹

5. God out of his infinite love hath so loved the world that he gave his only Son, to the end that whosoever believeth in him might have everlasting life. And he enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world, as he tasted death for every man.²

6. The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have the distinct knowledge of his death and sufferings, but even unto those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of his death, though ignorant of the history, if they suffer his grace to take place in their hearts, so as of wicked men to become holy.³

In the above points Wesley sees nothing to challenge.

7. As many as receive the light in them is produced a holy and spiritual birth, bringing forth holiness, righteousness, purity, and all the other blessed fruits. By which holy birth, as we are sanctified, so are we justified.⁴

Wesley, as we would expect had a quarrel with this seventh point. He refuted the concept of Barclay, contending that it was also held by the Papists. To them "justifi-

Footnote continued from last page:

4.

We are noting Wesley's difference from Quakerism as to the relative merits of the Spirit and Scriptures, and this had no specific reference to our agreement or Wesley's disagreement with concept of what the Spirit is. Our interest in this phase of his theology plays a secondary part to our desire to know how he thought the various streams of mystical thought differed from christianity.

1

Ibid.

2

Ibid.

3

Ibid., pp. 178, 179.

4

Ibid., p. 179.

cation" meant making one "just." Further it was all one with sanctification. Wesley objected to this, for it meant "a flat justification by works." Christians are justified by faith only.

8. In whom this holy birth is fully brought forth, the body of sin and death is crucified, and their hearts are subjected to the truth, so as not to obey any suggestion of the evil one; but to be free from actual sinning and transgressing of the law of God, and, in that respect, perfect.¹

9. They in whom his grace hath wrought in part to purify and sanctify them, may yet by disobedience fall from it and make shipwreck of the faith.²

Wesley sees no reason for disparaging the last two points but makes the interesting comment that the phrase, "This holy birth brought forth," was taken from Jacob Boehme. His thorough study of the whole problem is revealed in the succeeding sentence: "And indeed so are many other expressions used by the Quakers, as are also many of their sentiments." Even without the historical perspective which we have today Wesley was astute enough to recognize a relationship between the teachings of a traditional mystic and those of the Quakers.

10. By this light of God in the heart, every true Minister is ordained, prepared and supplied in the work of the ministry.³

Wesley agrees with the spiritual truth that every true

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Ibid., p. 179.

2

Ibid.

3

Ibid., pp. 179, 180.

minister has the light of God. He is ready to quarrel over the necessity of laying on of hands, showing herein his churchmanship. He agrees with a further statement concerning the permissibility of receiving money for pastoral services, provided the office is not used "as a trade to get money thereby." He does not enlarge upon this special objection. There follows a pointless discussion over the question of women speaking or preaching in church. The Quakers allowed it; Wesley thought it unscriptural. From a literal point of view, he had the best of the argument.

11. All true worship of God is offered in the inward and immediate moving of his own Spirit. We ought not to pray or preach where and when we will, but where and when we are moved thereto by his Spirit. All other worship, both praises, prayers, and preachings, which man sets about in his own will, and at his own appointment, which he can begin and end at pleasure, do or leave undone, as himself sees fit, are but superstitions, will-worship, and abominable idolatries.¹

True to his usual keeness of his insight, Wesley maintains that this expresses one of the main differences between Quakerism and Christianity.² The place which reason plays in the operating of God's Spirit upon men is expressed so well by Wesley, that we can do no better than to use his own words:

God moves man whom he has made a reasonable creature, according to the reason which he has given

1

Ibid., pp. 180-184.

2

We do not agree with Wesley's separation of "quakerism" and "Christianity" into separate camps, but we are employing his terminology to avoid needless confusion and qualification.

"beget faith." Results have proven the presence of faith. The Quakers talked against formalism in worship in Methodism. It would be more Christian, thought Wesley, to concentrate on the intentions and tempers of the worshipers.

He will have none of their insistence upon "silence" as a "principal part of God's worship." He accuses them, in their own terms at this point of being guilty of "will worship, for there is no "command or example for it in Scripture." Wesley is truly himself as he balances text against text to floor his opponent. He attacks the applications made of texts quoted by Barclay. Many of the terms around which this eleventh point revolves such as "ceasing from all outwards, in the natural will and comprehension," and "feeling after the inward seed of life." Wesley claims are borrowed from Jacob Boehme.

12. As there is one Lord and one faith, so there is one baptism.¹

He charges the Quakers with denying the outward baptism to which this statement refers. There follows an uninteresting quibble over the terms "baptism of water", "baptism of John", "baptism of the Holy Ghost", and "baptism of Christ".

13. The breaking of bread by Christ with his disciples was but a figure, and ceases in such as have obtained the substance.²

¹ Ibid., pp. 184-185.

² Ibid., p. 185.

Here is another manifest difference between Quakerism and Christianity avers Mr. Wesley. He agrees with Barclay upon four points of elaboration, namely, (1) Believers partake of the sacrament in a spiritual manner, (2) the same may be done, in a sense, at times other than when eating the bread or drinking the wine, (3) Lutherans, Calvinists, Papists, differ on the communion, and (4) Many have "spoken wildly and absurdly concerning it." Yet all this does not absolve us from doing what Christ expressly commanded. To say that the command no longer applies to those who "have obtained the substance" is non-Scriptural.

14. Since God hath assumed to himself the dominion of the conscience, who alone can rightly instruct and govern it; therefore it is not lawful for any whatsoever to force the conscience of others.¹

With this statement Wesley finds himself in full accord.

15. It is not lawful for Christians to give or receive titles of honour, as Your Majesty, Your Lordship, etc.²

Wesley expertly defends the using of titles from the practices of Paul; and charges that it is nothing short of superstition to scruple at a matter of this kind.

But the placing religion in such things as these is such egregious trifling as naturally tends to make all religion stink in the nostrils of Infidels and Heathens.³

1

Ibid., p. 185.

2

Ibid., p. 186.

3

Ibid.

On the basis that there is no Biblical basis for the command, he challenges the Quaker practice of refusing to bow the knee or body or uncover the head to any man. We would expect Wesley to agree, on the other hand, with their insistence that "superfluities in apparel," games, sports, and plays..." are not consistent with gravity and godly fear."

After touching upon one or two further matters, Wesley makes a witheringly sarcastic but eloquent, appeal to his former Methodist friend to reconsider his religion.

Friend you have an honest heart but a weak head; you have a zeal, but not according to knowledge. You were zealous once for the love of God and man, for holiness of life. You are now zealous for particular forms of speaking, for a set of phrases and opinions. Once your zeal was against ungodliness and unrighteousness, against evil tempers and evil works. Now it is against forms of prayer, against singing psalms, or hymns, against appointing times of praying or preaching; against saying you to a single person, uncovering your head, or having too many buttons on your coat. O what a fall is here! What poor trifles are these, that now well-nigh engross your thoughts! Come back, come back, to the weightier matters of the law, to spiritual, rational, scriptural religion. No longer waste your time and strength in beating the air, in vain controversies and strife of words; but bend your whole soul to the growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the continually advancing in that holiness, without which you cannot see the Lord.¹

The most significant differences between the Quakers and "Christians" (and this is definitely stated by Wesley, himself) were upon "the Scriptures, justification, baptism, and the Lord's Supper." Making allowances for the undoubted

¹ Ibid., pp. 187 f.

reflection in Wesley of the common antagonism against the Friends, and after charging him with being too contentious over minor matters, we find much sound ground for his disparagement of them. Religious history has verified the superior values of Wesley's teachings on the particular points which caused him to clash with the Quakers.

SUMMARY

It was inevitable that sooner or later Wesley should have broken with the Moravians. Their quietism which over-emphasized faith and minimized action could not hold a vigorous Christian of his type. Law always held his respect, but Wesley surpassed him in offering to people a means of finding the spiritual power they needed. Throughout, he reemphasizes rationality, Scriptural proof, witness of the spirit, (though he dealt with it cautiously when answering the Quakers), obeying the commands of God, justification and sanctification through faith. The common sense of Wesley will not allow him to turn with friendly eye toward any expression of religion which suggests aberrations, or which disregards accepted means and modes of grace.

I believe it is true that God was as close to Wesley as to the medieval mystics, William Law the quietists, or the Quakers. His experience of salvation of the Holy Spirit, was realistic beyond reasonable doubt. His first-hand knowledge of God's grace was as vital and arresting

and spiritually integrating as the most intense experiences recorded by the various classes of mystical worshipers. What is even more important, the sturdiness, thoroughness, the practicality and the ethically uplifting nature of his life and message, built into the foundations of a nation-wide revival feature needed by, and safe for the common man. We can say more. Not only could the lower classes of England profit spiritually, morally, and ethically from the principles upheld in early Methodism, but such was equally true of the more favoured groups. Classical, Medieval, or quietistic mysticism has not been qualified to merit such wide-spread acceptance. It has failed to come to grips with the life of the average citizen.

This brings us to the threshold of the ethical implications of Wesley's life and teachings, a topic with which we shall deal in the following chapter.

THE ETHICAL OUTREACH
OF WESLEY'S TEACHINGS

Chapter VI

David Baines-Griffiths has sounded a true note in the title to one of the chapters in his book, Wesley the Anglican. It reads, "Methodism: A Personal Faith with Social Consequences." The day of the "social gospel" of modern liberalism had not yet been born. Criticism of the social system was not new, but nowhere had it developed into special systems of thought, worthy to be called "isms". Wesley's purpose was to spread "Scriptural holiness" throughout the length and breadth of England, but his approach was to the individual conscience. His preaching, for the most part made a direct appeal to the sinner's need for the saving power of Christ. He taught and preached salvation through repentance, justification, and sanctification. The convert was started out upon the strenuous road toward spiritual perfection, a sort of flying goal which was very seldom, if ever, reached. If reached, it was only in terms of our complete possession by the love of God. We were still subject to the limitations of human knowledge and could not escape the inevitability of making wrong decisions.

Wesley taught, however, that holiness to be worth anything, can never remain within the sphere of individual-

ism. Societies were necessary, he discovered, if for no other reason than that the people might be sustained, helped, corrected, and educated along religious lines. As soon as organization starts, you have situations with all kinds of ethical possibilities. Just as Wesley found that his own life was unchristian unless it reached out beyond his own righteousness, on a bigger scale, the societies were compelled to express their religious convictions in practical terms. They had to deal with some of the social evils of the day.

In its general outlines, Wesley's life follows that of many medieval mystics, in so far as the individual vs. the social, or more properly, the inward, vs. the outward expression is concerned. Though he had aided the poor, and preached in the prisons, though he had engaged in missionary activities before Aldersgate, his thoughts were always upon his inward chaos. He was forever reaching out for a spiritual peace which evaded him, despite his most strenuous efforts. It was only after achieving a measure of inward integration that Wesley was enabled to work for the salvation of others. Roughly speaking, the lives of such mystics as St. Francis of Assissi, Eckhart, St. John of the Cross, Santa Theresa, Mme. Guyon, St. Catherine of Genoa, follow the same divisions of growth and expression. All spent their youth and early maturity trying to unite their lives with God or Christ, to purify

every thought and motive to be worthy of the Divine Companion or Lover. It was after a certain measure of psychological integration had taken place that these people were free to turn their thoughts to the uplifting and salvaging of others. Every one of the mystics I have named made an outstanding contribution to the religious and social life of his or her day. We see, then, that so far as the general pattern of religious development is concerned, Wesley's life is not radically different from that of the mystics which preceded him.

There are respects, however, in which sharp differences are discernible. Wesley's metaphysical presuppositions made it unnecessary for him to seek for a God who was utterly beyond the human sphere. The Spirit touched the mind through the rational processes. This made intellectual conviction equal to the feeling of spiritual illumination experienced by the mystics. The mystics, following a neoplatonic metaphysic, were necessarily striving for a form of experience in which the soul would be released from its worldly ties, that it might traverse the dark abyss to unite with the Wholly Other Beyond. I think Jones is correct in maintaining that it was this sort of philosophical background which had its psychological counterpart in ecstasy. An unusual state must be attained, otherwise the soul could not be freed to seek this God of extreme transcendence. There may be a definite limit to the applicability of Jones'

explanation when we turn to the ecstasy of the Prophets. God for Isaiah was awesomely transcendent; for Jeremiah he was much more imminent. Yet, both had experiences in the opinions of reputable scholars, which border at least upon the ecstatic state. In addition to the metaphysic involved, there was the additional factor of the psychic make-up of the individual. In addition, the external forces which converged to make a personality, were important.

Of value for us in this discussion is the fact that the metaphysic of Wesley was non-mystical, that his practical rationality was fundamentally different attitude toward life from the exaltation of feeling so characteristic of the mystical schools. This made him the sort of religious leader who could teach and preach over a long period of years, dealing with superstition, ignorance, immorality, drunkenness, smuggling, extravagances of all kinds. A less vigorous personality would have had little effect upon the general religious apathy. It required a steadiness of mind, stability of a purpose, the support of a stern logic, an inner radiance growing out of the witness of God's Spirit with his own, that he was not only a servant, but a son of the Most High was his artesian well of life and power. His was a courage not born of a recollected ecstasy, but of the conviction that God was with him as he faced daily difficulties.

The ethical results of early Methodism and of John Wesley's influence in particular, have been pictured in glowing colors by many writers. Bishop McConnell gives us a balanced picture, calling our attention to Wesley's limitations in this regard as well as to his strengths.

He visited the prisons, preaching to the condemned without ever raising the question of the legal justice involved. He saw a new day of industrial organization in which thousands of children were exploited, but raised no protest. He was against the revolution of the Colonists, being almost blind in his loyalty to the reigning monarch of England. We may wonder how he could have fallen short in these important regards, but it becomes quite understandable when we recall that he was a child of his time, that he was conservative by temperament, that he made no pretense of being a social reformer, in the sense we use that term today.

There is another side to the picture. Wesley was very much concerned about the way in which Methodists used their money. He advocated that one should gain all he could, save all he could, and give away all he could.¹ He insisted that

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Wesley's own practice, and that which he advocated, was to "gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can." It is often overlooked that he qualified the first part of this rule with these eight subsidiary demands:

- a. Not at the expense of human life.
- b. Without hurting our minds or bodies.
- c. Without hurting our neighbors (substance).
- d. Without hurting our neighbor's body (health).

smuggling be eradicated, that liquor be neither sold nor drunk, that horse racing, gaming, gambling and cock-fighting were works of evil. In a day when it was perilous so to do, he spoke openly against the enclosures which were leaving many without lands or means of support. He insisted that slavery was one of the greatest curses men had perpetrated. He established Sunday Schools, spread abroad a knowledge of religious music, something of a taste for literature, advocated that his ministers should keep abreast of the times in matters of science and medicine. It is no wonder that he has been credited with saving England from moral bankruptcy by enthusiastic interpreters. Our own judgment is that he played a big part in bringing a higher level of morality and spiritual life to the English, but that the real reforms were accomplished after his day.

I believe McConnell is making a sound statement when he asserts that Wesley's greatest contribution was that he helped to create a kind of situation, and to develop a social conscience upon which later reformers such as Shaftesbury could build. Since the societies were numerous, numbering in membership close to 70,000 at Wesley's

Footnote continued from last page:

- e. Doctors, etc, must not "play" with life for their own gain.
- f. Without hurting a neighbor's soul.
- g. By honest industry.
- h. By common sense.

See John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions, (New York, 1854), Sermon on, "The Use of Money," pp. 440-448.

death, a great deal of influence had been exerted upon the moral tone of England. Though Wesley did not see that for a more perfect individual experience we must have a more perfect environment, the influences of the Methodist revival were definite and far-reaching in social terms. Bishop McConnell makes a careful and appreciative analysis of this influence, stating that there were at least three ways in which Methodism made its larger contribution. His points are these:

1. Laborers were served in that they were taught a new appreciation of themselves as potential Sons of God. They were lifted out of the sordidness of their life, and made to see "a higher spiritual world."

2. Many workers were lifted, through frugality and thrift, to positions of leadership in industry. This led Wesley to be greatly concerned for the growing wealth of Methodists.

3. Minds like Shaftesbury's were aroused to the wrongs possible under the new Industrial order, even though Shaftesbury "would have to be accredited to the evangelical temper as a whole rather than to the Methodist branch."¹

McConnell gives Wesley credit, not alone for a widespread ethical influence, but considers him, in a sense one of the forerunners of the Romantic Movement. He concludes his chapter on the outreach Wesley's life and teaching with these words:

Wesley's thinking was personal but also institutional, realistic as well as spiritual, administrative as well as absorbed in the inner life, more deeply and highly ethical than most of the romantic-

¹

Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley, pp. 292 ff.

cists. Nevertheless it is fair to count Wesley among those vital, enkindling, enlightening forces which so changed the atmosphere of his time as to make it hospitable to Wordsworth and Burns and Dickens when they came. It is absurd to say that these romanticist geniuses would not have come at all if it had not been for Wesley, but without Wesley they might not have come so soon, or have wrought so powerfully for the release of the higher human possibilities.¹

SUMMARY

We have looked briefly at the distinctions to be drawn between the ethical emphases of Wesley and those of the great mystics who, in their own right, made significant religious and social contributions. This resolved itself into questions of metaphysics, temperaments, and social environments. His God was not Wholly Other, yet his demands were imperative. His God reached the consciousness through the common avenues of prayer, reason, and Scriptural study. Thus, his approach to God was much more adaptable to the psychology of the normal worshiper than the strenuous methods of mystical schools. It required, not a direct product of mysticism, but a product of evangelicalism which was capable of absorbing some of the stronger points of mysticism, to play the role of itinerant preacher, organizer, and administrator which Wesley so capably fulfilled.

We repeat our contention that it would be possible to call the kind of life portrayed by John Wesley a product of

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Ibid. p. 310.

evangelical mysticism. He called himself an "evangelical," but denied the term "mysticism." It was commonly used to describe classical or medieval mystics with their Neoplatonic metaphysical schemes. In our final chapter we shall summarize our findings in respect to the various evangelical and mystical elements which went into Wesley's life and teaching, and present a further word in favour of employing the term evangelical mysticism.

CHAPTER VII
EVALUATIONS

What we propose to do in this chapter is to reaffirm and restate our reasons for wishing to apply the term evangelical mysticism to the life and teachings of John Wesley.

Our study shows that he cannot be catalogued with the classical mystics, of which Plotinus and Augustine are representatives. Neither does he follow the medieval mystics like Santa Theresa, Mme. Guyon or Eckhart. He definitely repudiated the quietism of the Moravians and put Quakerism and Christianity in almost completely separate categories. His asceticism was of a milder type than that of mystical practice. His respect for tradition and his high churchmanship place him within a different framework from that of the mystical schools. One of the most important differences was his use of the Bible as mediator of God's revelation. His practicality made his ethical influence more potent than a typical mystic's would have been.

There are respects in which we can trace similarities. Rigid self-discipline, the feeling of utter helplessness without God, the emphasis upon love of God and man, the striving after inner purity, the conviction of God's presence and guidance, the feeling of divine mission: all of these in greater or less degree characterize both Wesley and mystics. There are other similarities and dissimilari-

ties but these are the most important from the standpoint of our theme.

The term vital mysticism is proposed by Dr. C. E. Schofield. He has recently published a little study book for Methodists entitled We Methodists. In discussing "Our Methodist Heritage", he stresses a vital mysticism as one of three major characteristics. He defines it as "a sense of immediate contact, through the ordinary channels of intelligence and understanding, with indubitable spiritual reality."¹ This reminds us, at once, of Wesley's contention that the Spirit of God makes itself known through the common processes of the intellect, and of his belief that conviction is equal with, if not superior to, a compulsion based upon feeling.²

Schofield enlarges his concept by referring to three emphases characteristic of early Methodists.

1. Experimental religion throughout Wesley's writings sounds the confident testimony that every man might know, beyond per adventure of doubt, that he was a child of God.³ "Ours is an experimentally verifiable faith," says Schofield, and italicizes the words.

1

Charles E. Schofield, We Methodists, (New York, 1939).

2

Refer to page in thesis on which his answer to Quakers is given.

3

In his sermon, "On Predestination", Wesley affirms that we know of our relationship to God both inwardly and outwardly. The former refers to the inward impress of God's Spirit upon man's soul, and the latter means "by the word of His grace", the Bible and the preached word. (Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions, Vol. II, p. 40.)

2. "The witness of the Spirit," was, as Wesley says in one of his sermons on the subject, "The most precious gift and the one grand part of the testimony which God has given to the Methodists to bear to all mankind."¹

3. Yearning after complete holiness of living.²

During the early stages of this paper's preparation, I

Footnote continued from last page:

Toward the close of a sermon entitled "The General Deliverance," Wesley enjoins his hearers to

"Rest not till you enjoy the privilege of humanity; the knowledge and love of God! Lift up your hearts to the source of your being!

'Know God, and teach your souls to know
The joys that from religion flow.'"
(*Ibid.*)

p. 57.)

"Awake Thou That Sleepest," is a sermon in which he asks a series of pertinent questions by which one can judge whether or not he has become a child of God. He wants to know, for example if the love of God was "shed abroad in their hearts," and makes happiness in God, the love of one's brother, and belief that one's sins have been taken away other important tests. (*Ibid.*, I. p. 24 f.)

The final plea which closes a sermon on "Justification by Faith", gives us another example of Wesley's emphasis upon experimental religion:

"The Lord hath need of thee. Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell art just fit to advance his glory; the glory of his free grace, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not. Oh come quickly! Believe in the Lord Jesus; and thou even thou, art reconciled to God." (*Ibid.*, p. 52.)

I

Ibid., p. 93. This sermon is entitled, "The Witness of the Spirit." Further on in this same discourse, Wesley writes, "It follows, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.'"
Thus, this sentence illustrates both points we have made. In short, one experiences the "witness of the Spirit." This is one of the most frequent phrases in Wesley's sermons. on this subject.

2

We have given a sufficient number of quotations already to illustrate Wesley's interest in holiness. His doctrine of Perfection is basically an exposition of how holiness is progressively achieved. I believe it is safe to say that nearly every one of the 140 sermons of Wesley's which have been preserved, have something to say which relates directly to holiness.

wrote a letter to Rufus Jones, in which I outlined the main points to be covered in this paper and asked him if he thought my contention for the use of the terms vital or evangelical mysticism was justified. I quote the first sentence of his reply: "You are quite right in holding that early Methodists had a type of mysticism which might be called vital or evangelical mysticism."¹ It has been Jones' consistent contention that the heart of mysticism is an experience of God's presence. Its queer aberrations have been due to arid metaphysical conceptions, sensitive psychic temperaments and unresolved inner tensions of those practicing it. In one of the references to which his letter pointed me, Jones writes:

The best course open to us is to "disinfect" the word of its sinister meanings or perhaps better still to sublimate it to its higher uses.... I think it ought to be used in the sphere of religion.... It has held an important place in the experience of the race, but ecstatic contemplation is not the essentia of mysticism; it is only the form imposed upon mystical experience by the prevailing philosophical and psychological framework of a given metaphysical theory.... But other souls, as saintly, have reached the same goal by a different path, a path which has as good right to be called a "mystic way" as has the "ecstatic flight" In short, the essentia of mysticism ought to be thought of simply as the experience of direct communion of the soul with God.

1

I prefer evangelical mysticism. No doubt every school of mystics would have insisted that their brand of mysticism was a vital sort. Vital, used in this connection, has no historical roots whatever. On the other hand evangelical and mysticism are words with a great deal of important history behind them. Our contention is that they should be combined. Each represents factors without which religion

If we accept this definition of mysticism, one which corresponds with other writers like C. A. Bennett., James B. Pratt, William James, William Ernest Hocking, we are free to apply it to the experience of a great religious leader like John Wesley especially if our study reveals that his experience of a God was central in his life and teaching. (Upon the same grounds it can be applied to anyone having a vital contact with God.)

Upon this latter point, let me quote from Bishop McConnell:

The opinion of virtually all students of his life is that he stands out above the other religious leaders of his time for two qualities--his God-consciousness, or awareness of God, or devotion to what appeared to him to be the will of God, or whatever we mean by a God-filled spirit. On the other hand, the students concede to Wesley a talent for practical administration amounting to genius.¹

It is McConnell's opinion that Wesley's practical bent of mind had an influence upon his idea of God, of his conversion, of his formulation of Christian perfection, as well as his notion of the church. He states further,

It is most significant for our purpose to get firm hold of the fact that the most practically-minded churchman of the eighteenth century was the most persistent seeker after the highest spiritual ideals for himself and others.²

Footnotes continued from last page:
is not complete. With no attempt at levity, let it be said they have reached marriageable age, and deserve to be wed.

²

Rufus Jones, The Testimony of the Soul, (New York, 1936), pp. 200-202.

¹

Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley, p. 9.

The rational, practical elements in Wesley make the term evangelical peculiarly applicable to his mysticism or to his experience of God. He remained within the evangelical tradition. His life was kept vital and dynamic through his fellowship with God. We believe Wesley's quality of religion to be the par excellence of evangelical mysticism's achievements. I agree with Bishop McConnell who ventures the assertion that the words which John Wesley repeated over and over during his last hours: "The best of all is, God is with us," were the utterance of, and consummation of, a life-long purpose. The conclusion toward which this thesis has been pointing, and with which it now ends, is Evangelical Mysticism.



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